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THE SPLIT OF THE UNITED AUTOMOBILE  
WORKERS UNION  
AND  
THE STUDY OF BUREAUCRATIC ORGANIZATION

by  
George A. Johnson

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
Through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1993

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the historical development of the bureaucratic structure of the United Automobile, Aerospace, and Agricultural Implement Workers International Union (UAW) and its relationship with its Canadian arm. In doing so, particular emphasis is placed on the manner in which the American union bureaucracy exercised dominance and control over the Canadian sector of the UAW. The majority of the working class, in a condition of bureaucratic control, will always be under the dominance of a small minority of leaders.

The analytical framework used in this work is constructed around an understanding of industrial trade unions as a social force that purports to social change. These social forces are concerned with the conditions of the workplace, the political, economic and external conditions in which the trade unions operate. When pursuing a certain course of action, the success of the objectives is determined by the state of the economy, the political climate, and by the internal resources and dynamics of the trade union.

Before the 1980's, the UAW International union had conducted industry-wide negotiations under the traditional method of pattern bargaining. Pattern bargaining for the total industry was in the hands of the International officers. At the turn

of the decade the flood-gates were opened and the union leadership deviated away from the traditional system of pattern bargaining and negotiated "give-backs" to the corporations. This phenomenon that had lain dormant for many years, concessionary bargaining, would have a direct effect on the workers' standard of living and morale. Further, it would strain relations between the UAW American union leadership and the Canadian leadership. This would be evident in the constraints put on the Canadian leadership in their ability to pursue strategic collective bargaining issues that did not conform to the overall pattern of the American International union. The Canadian leadership resisted this type of control and began the discussions on the possibility of disenfranchising itself from the International union.



I dedicate this thesis to Jo-Anne Johnson who had the patience of Job.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Much of the historical background material for the thesis comes from sources contained in the media. In some instances the thesis is based upon personal interviews with many individuals who were part of the union.

I am grateful to the committee members for their patience in mentoring me. I want to thank Dr. Seymour Faber for his knowledge and for keeping me on the path, even though at times we disagree at one point or another.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the events leading to the determination of the Canadian Region of the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers (UAW) to split from its parent body after a forty year relationship based on international solidarity.

Since there is currently little published analysis on the subject of the split, my findings will be based on information gathered from interviews with UAW International officers and Canadian UAW staff and local union presidents, a survey of the Canadian UAW rank and file workers, mass media reports and interviews, and information from the Walter Reuther Library Labour Archives.

This thesis also examines the political internal struggles that were used by unions to reduce their organizations to a one party rule. During the rise of industrial unions, union leadership began to eliminate democratic processes which had been in force for years, and changes in labour-management relations served to curb the militancy of workers in the workplace. Important decisions for workers were made at the executive level, and the rank and file gradually began to have very little say in the running of the local union or the union

at the national level. Today the overwhelming majority of unions are ruled by one-party executives. Union after union has become an oligarchy, consisting of a political machine which enshrines itself in office indefinitely and chooses its own successors.

Also this thesis will look at two philosophies commonly adopted by unions regarding their societal role, that of business unionism and that of social unionism. The goals of business unionism are to negotiate, sign and administer contracts. Business unionists are only involved in politics to the extent that newly enacted legislation could effect their members' wages and workplace conditions. They are not interested in social issues outside the realm of this narrow jurisdiction. Nor are they interested in the social implications other smaller or weaker unions may be struggling with, as was the case in the Patco, Hormel and Phelps Dodge strikes. Business unionists are not interested in social reform, they emphasize economic action within their own small area of representation. The ideology of business unionism is to support capitalism and the profit system. The contradiction to business unionism is social unionism. Philosophically, social unionism promotes social reform and stretches far beyond the area of collective bargaining. Social unionism stresses the need for unions to unite with other organizations, to build coalitions with church groups,

other like-minded organizations, and smaller and weaker unions to lobby for political reform. Social unionists align themselves with a political party, usually a labour party, in the struggle for political reform.

As the labour movement got under way and international corporations began to consolidate, labour unrest began to flourish. To quell the unrest, corporations offered workers a broad range of benefits. Drastic changes in labour relations reduced the autocracy in the workplace. Both systems of unionism were directly involved in the changes taking place that effected the workers internal democracy.

I argue that Robert Michels' theory of the "iron law of oligarchy" is applicable to the findings of the facts in this thesis. Theoretically, many unions in North America and Europe are governed by an elitist minority of people under a one party system. Michels proposed that the complexities of administration demands bureaucracy. The cost to the rank and file of this type of system is a loss of power which has been usurped by the bureaucracy concentrated at the top. I argue that this type of bureaucracy, control by the few, weakens a union because it denies any meaningful input from the membership and leads to membership disinterest, and there is not much attempt by those at the top to sustain membership influence. Any effort by the leadership to get the membership

involved is usually only initiated when the outcome of a major problem could have a direct political impact on his/her role as leader. Leadership argues that the representative delegate system is democratic in that the membership transfers its will to an elected representative. In most cases the elected delegate is not carrying out the will of the membership but what is in his/her own best interest.

This thesis will argue that Robert White planned and executed the separation of the Canadian UAW from the parent body, the International UAW, because the UAW no longer reflected a social union philosophy, and that it had moved in a direction he and his closest Canadian UAW associates were not prepared to follow. Further evidence will show that there was conflict between White and most his colleagues on the UAW National Executive Board which he had failed to make known to most Canadian leadership. Evidence to this theory is supported by the writer's interview with Douglas Fraser when he stated,

When the company and the union go to the bargaining table, they both have a list of demands that will never be met. When serious bargaining begins the parties deal with the priorities and the rest is swept off the table. This will take more than one meeting. White and Beiber did not do that, they had one meeting and agreed to split."(Douglas Fraser interview, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. 11/29/90)

Fraser used this analogy to indicate that the events of the split as they were presented publicly are not a reflection of



reality.

Also this thesis, using Robert Michels' theory of the iron law of oligarchy, will examine how Robert White implemented the split in the UAW without seeking prior approval from the Canadian membership.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND MICHELS' IRON LAW OF OLIGARCHY

#### (i) Bureaucracy in the Unions

In 1915, R. Michels in his work Political Parties stated that "internal differences, factions in organizations arise from the objective needs of the various branches of activity." (Michels;1962,p.175).

In two cases only does it sometimes happen that the relationship between the two tendencies (as it was between Bieber and White) become strained to the breaking point. In the first place this may happen when the leader of one of the two factions possesses a profound faith in their own ideas and are characterized by tactical fanaticism and theoretical irreconcilability...or, in other words, when the objective reasons which divide them from their opponents are felt with an unaccustomed force and are possessed with an unwonted sincerity. In the second place, it may happen when one of the parties, in the consequence of offended dignity or reasonable susceptibility, find it psychologically impossible to live with the other, and to carry on within the confines of the same association a continued struggle for dominion over the masses. The party will then break up into two distinct organisms, (as did the UAW) and in each of these there will be renewed the oligarchical phenomena we have been describing." (Michels,1962,p.183)

In the trade union movement, the authoritative character of the leaders and their tendency to rule democratic organizations on oligarchic lines are even more pronounced than in political organizations (Michels, 1962, 159). Victor Reuther noted:

The administration caucus, which was used as a legitimate weapon in our battle with the communists, was maintained many years after the battle was over. Essentially, a great deal of authority became concentrated at the top. The vehicle of the administration caucus now is used to prevent open debate in the union."  
(Mann, 1987, 89)

(ii) Centralized Control

Paul Schrade, former UAW international representative, elaborates after Walter Reuther's death:

There was an election among the members of the International Executive Board to fill Walter's position. As a regional director at the time, I was one of twenty-five members who supported Fraser, who I felt could best carry on Reuther's social unionism. While Fraser had come out against the war (Vietnam) late, Woodcock was a hard liner about the war, and was enamoured of the power of G.M. When the Board vote was taken it was thirteen for Woodcock and twelve for Fraser. Despite the significant differences between the two men, the election was not taken out to the local presidents or to the convention, and certainly not to the shop floor. As far as we were concerned the election was over. We used to refer to the International Executive Board as "the club." The unwritten law was that we could disagree all we wanted...among ourselves...but we could not take those disagreements outside of "the club".  
(Mann, 1987, p.89)

For a good many years now, the executive committees of the trade union federations have endeavoured to usurp the

exclusive right to decide on behalf of the rank and file, the rhythm of the movement for better wages, and consequently the right to strike whether or not the strike is legitimate. Since union leaders are in control of strike funds, the dispute reduces itself in practice to the question of who is to decide whether a strike shall or shall not be terminated. A strike has value for both sides.

The union, its members badly hit by inflation, had the largest and most expensive list of demands in its history.(General Motors strike, 1970)  
A strike, by putting the workers on the street, rolls the steam out of them...it reduces their demands and thus brings agreement and ratification; it also solidifies the authority of the union hierarchy." (Serrin,1972,4)

The question of when a strike shall be terminated is one that involves the very life of the democratic right of organized workers in trade unions to regulate their own affairs.

When leaders claim that they alone have the right to decide a matter of such importance, and still more when they already possess this right it is obvious that the last essential democratic principles are infringed. The leaders have openly converted themselves into an oligarchy, leaving to the masses who provide the funds no more than the duty of accepting the decisions of the oligarchy."(Michels, 1962,p.159)

Whether emphasis is placed on the repression of the labour left or simply the operation of a 'Michelsian iron law of oligarchy', the triumph of bureaucratism has usually been seen as the determinant event in the dissipation of activism at the base." (Davis,1988, p. 53)

In many instances of union-company confrontations, union leaders will contravene the fundamental principles of 'democracy' and order the close of the agitation or the

resumption of work. In Political Parties, Michels illustrates two such instances in which this type of oligarchical process took place.

In 1905, the coal miners in the Ruhr basin were enraged against their leaders when they had taken it upon themselves to declare the...miners' strike at an end. It seemed as if on this occasion the oligarchy was at length to be called to account by the masses. A few weeks later, tranquillity was restored as if it had never been disturbed. The leaders had defied the anger of their followers and had nevertheless remained in power. In Turin, Italy, in October 1907, on the third day of the general strike, the workers had decided by a large majority that the strike should be continued, but the leaders (the executive committee of the local branch of the party and the committees of the local trade unions) went counter to this decision, which ought to have been valid for them, by issuing a manifesto in which they counselled the strikers to return to work. (Michels, 1962, p.169)

The masses in such cases are often sulky, but they never rebel, for they lack the power to punish the treachery of the chiefs. In most cases of wildcat strikes and illegal work stoppages the union leadership orders the workers back to work. Workers will comply with the request although they do so against their will. Union leadership generally is opposed to workers' revolutionary tactics and would much rather take the conciliatory approach to settling the conflict. Workers do rebel! They rebel out of frustration when they are unable to get the support of the union leadership to have their grievances settled.

Thus the governing bodies of democratic and socialist parties

can, in case of need, act entirely at their own discretion, maintaining a virtual independence of the collectivity they represent, and in practice making themselves omnipotent.

## MICHELS' THEORY OF ORGANIZATION

### (i) Oligarchic Tendencies

The central thesis which Michels develops in his classical study of political parties and trade union organizations, Political Parties, is that internal democracy leads to oligarchy, and necessarily contains an oligarchical central part. Organization implies the tendency to oligarchy. The growth of modern industrial society saw the beginning of organizations in society. The advent of bureaucracy is closely related to the notion of specialized division of labour. A highly specialized division of labour in any organization tends to generate a hierarchy of authority and a system of rules. The expansion of administrative tasks involved inevitably leads to the creation of a bureaucracy which by its very nature is undemocratic. Corporations are all illustrative of this oligarchic process. Decisions are increasingly made by leadership with the organization rather than assemblies of rank and file or in the case of corporations by subordinates. In trade unions the delegate-represented system is established to carry out "the will of the membership". The trade union organization which was

created to represent the rank and file ends up largely excluding them from participating in the decision making process.

The oligarchical structure of the building suffocates the basic democratic principle. Inevitably, organizations produce oligarchy, that is, rule by a small elite. In every organization, whether it be a political party, a professional union, or any other association of the kind, the aristocratic tendency manifests itself very clearly. The American Legion was founded in 1919 by a small group of veterans and was run by a self-perpetuating oligarchy who have been called "kingmakers" by those who are critical of their power to name national commanders (Barber, 1950, p.485). In another discussion of the evidence sustaining Michels' thesis that the bureaucracy dominates the organization, Peter Blau points to various studies analyzing the way in which directors of corporations control the policies of the corporation regardless of the stockholders' wishes. As he indicated, in almost all corporations the stockholder has "...about as much choice in elections as the citizen of a totalitarian nation. He has almost no way of opposing the leadership...." (Blau, 1971, p.158).

#### (ii) Representative System-Leadership Control

Paul M. Harrison, in his excellent study of the American

Baptist Convention, reported that Michels' hypotheses are validated in this group as well, that it is a highly bureaucratic organization and that the central leadership has a great deal of authority over activities and policies. And the effort "...to stabilize the process of organizational coordination results in the original goals by the methods of bureaucratic procedure." "Thus, from a means, the organization becomes an end." (Harrison,1959,136). In his detailed analysis of the government of American Trade Unions, William Leiserson described them as "one-party" systems. He pointed out that in most unions,

Factional divisions among the members in the manner of political parties are generally looked upon as hostile to unionism. An organized opposition within the unions to the officials chosen to govern them is regarded as not essentially different from attacks by outside opponents. The overwhelming pressure is for unity, unanimity." (Leiserson,1959,p.75)

Trade unions establish a form of representative system whereby

delegates represent the mass and carry out its will." "If the people delegate their sovereignty, they resign it, the people no longer govern themselves, they are governed, delegation of power is an absurdity. (Carlo Pisacane quote from Political Parties.p.74)

Once a system of representative democracy is established in trade unions, it results in appointment of full time officials (Haralambos,1985,p.289).

Michels argues that the price of increased bureaucracy is



concentration of power at the top and the lessening of influence by rank and file members. The greater the bureaucratization of an organization the less the potential for memberships' influence over policy matters (Lipset,1967,p.363). The leaders of the organization are equipped with special skills that the rank and file do not have, particularly specialized knowledge of the organization, political skills, speaking ability, ability to write periodicals, privy to much information both internal and external, and dominance over the means of communication. Because the masses do not have access to these resources and information the rank and file are incapable of taking an active part in the decision making. That they are different, Michels writes, is evident from the slackness of attendance at ordinary membership meetings. And, since the various political and ideological issues are not merely beyond the understanding of the rank and file, but leave them cold altogether, they are incompetent. Michels notes the reasons for slackness: "When his work is finished the proletariat can think only of rest and getting to bed in good time." (Michels,1962,p.87).

Occasionally rank and file members will step outside the legal framework of labour relations, by way of work stoppages and wildcat strikes, if the union bureaucracy fails to show concern for their problems. Control of the collective

bargaining process is a major factor which allows international unions to ignore the demands of the membership. When leaders are confronted with a rebellion from within the organization and their authority and office are threatened, the leaders become extremely aggressive and will not hesitate to resort to undemocratic behaviour. Example: a wildcat strike occurred at the Chrysler Mack Avenue Plant in Detroit, Michigan. The strike was prompted by the company's failure to address serious health and safety problems. After efforts by the company and police officials failed to get the workers to disband, international officers appeared with a thousand UAW officials and retired workers, and armed with baseball bats and other weapons forced the members off the picket line and into the plant (Moody, 1989, p.93).

In 1947, when Walter Reuther took over control of the 800,000 member auto workers union, he succeeded in consolidating the organization's power into one faction to such an extent that there has never been any serious challenge to its leadership since its victory (Halpern, 1988,p.3). For leaders to lose command of their organization is to lose that which makes them important, hence they are strongly motivated to preserve their office even if it requires using repressive methods. Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and John L. Lewis of the United Mine Workers Union both ruthlessly suppressed any opposition within their respective unions

(Moody,1989,p.30). Such behaviour was legitimated by pointing out that a mass organization was inevitably an organization maintaining itself by its struggle against powerful and evil opponents. Walter Reuther, President of the United Auto Workers did not consider any opposition as legitimate. In the eyes of the International Executive Board there was no opposition, "only treason". Genuine opposition was not tolerated, and the UAW remained a one party controlled system until the social and economic conditions of the 1960's provoked a new wave of opposition (Moody,1989,p.47).

The problem of democracy in union government resides in the vast discrepancy in power, organization and resources between the administration and any possible opposition, whether that opposition arises out of the rank and file or the secondary leadership. Union administration is power permanently mobilized, not merely to deal with employers but also to guarantee the continued dominance of the incumbent officialdom (Benson,1986,p.32, The Fight for Union Democracy). Therefore, all efforts to introduce factionalism to challenge appropriateness of party or organization policy, resulted in aid and comport to its enemies. Reuther told the delegates at the 1951 UAW convention,

...we are never going back to those old days of factionalism, we are going ahead together...the past is dead, as far a factional considerations are concerned." (Moody,1989,p.47)

(iii) Suppression of the Opposition

Herman Benson, in discussing the occasional wave of insurgency;

In conception, there is nothing new here. Back in 1915, the sociologist Robert Michels described these relationships as the inevitable outcome of an iron law of oligarchy. Some forty years later, in the study of the International Typographical Union, Lipset, Trow and Coleman tested Michels' analysis and arrived at gloomy conclusions on the fate of union democracy. Despite the "deviant" two-party system in the ITU, union government seemed doomed to be governed by Michels' iron law."  
(Benson, Ibid, 1986, p.329)

In theory, unions are constitutional democracies ruled from the bottom up; in reality they are oligarchies, some more absolute, some more limited, ruled from the top down by an administrative team dominated by national officers.

According to Michels there are tendencies that interfere with the realization of democracy. For Michels these tendencies were dependent: 1) upon the nature of the individual, 2) upon the nature of the political struggle, 3) upon the nature of the organization. As a result of these tendencies democracy leads to oligarchy and necessarily contains an oligarchic central point. This thesis makes no attempt to offer an approach to a new system of union democracy but rather to illustrate how the present organizations are governed by a strong bureaucratic elite, and to determine if the new organization was transformed in a more democratic one after it acquired its own autonomy from the International union.

Unlike corporations, unions have no independent life of their own apart from the members. They come and go, grow and decline, with changes in the conditions that produced them. The Canadian UAW leaders, having acquired occupational skills through their long association with the International UAW union, developed a bureaucratic approach similar to the International administration. The United Automobile Workers Union is the type of organization that has within its structure, bureaucratic tendencies. Large scale organizations give their officers a near monopoly of power. Surveys of the internal life of trade unions have yielded evidence to support "the iron law of oligarchy".

In Political Parties, Michels cites Clark Kerr, who indicated that trade unions are no exception to one-party rule, that almost all trade unions are controlled by an entrenched administration, and to some extent still fulfil their primary functions in the interest of the members. However, what inevitably happens is that those placed in positions of authority to serve the interests of the rank and file soon develop interests of their own which are antagonistic to those of the rank and file. In the matter of the split, the United Automobile Workers International leaders were challenged by executive board member Robert White who could not accept the direction of the organization and its new method of negotiating contracts. Nor could he provide a rationale to

his membership for the acceptance of inferior contracts containing clauses that were concessionary in nature, and also that had a profound effect on the aim and the past accomplishments of the United Automobile Workers Union. The union had agreed to give up annual pay increases and give up cost of living adjustments. Workers also gave back wage and fringe benefits in return for no plant closings and the outsourcing of work.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BUSINESS UNIONISM VS SOCIAL UNIONISM

The American union leadership of the auto workers, at the time of the split, was making a sharp break from pattern bargaining which had been established four decades earlier, and was reverting back to the way of business unionism. What ideas of social unionism the leadership did have were being replaced by a system of business unionism. Business unionism regards unionism mainly as a bargaining institution. Social unionism is oriented to change, the future's creative shaping force. It placed the unions in the vanguard of a broad social advance in society.

The two leaders of the United Auto Workers, Bieber and White, displayed different approaches to unionism. One was an advocate of modern business unionism, the other leaned toward the concept of social unionism. These were very fundamental trade union differences and created opposing positions on relevant social issues that had effects on the working class. Business unions fight for immediate wage gains and goals that can be realized in a few years. Business unionism is an approach to labour organizing that looks on its task in the same manner as a business person selling commodities, its

commodity is labour where labour power is bought and sold to the highest bidder. Emphasis then, is on wages to the exclusion of working conditions. They are mostly concerned with legislation that effects collective bargaining and workers' rights, not social reforms. They do not see unions as a vehicle for social change.

In his book Trade Unionism in the United States, Hoxie uses the term business unionism to refer to what many call pure and simple trade unionism as opposed to either class or revolutionary unionism.

Business unionism...is essentially trade-consciousness, rather than class-consciousness. That is to say, it expresses the viewpoint and interests of the workers in a craft or industry rather than those of the working class as a whole. It aims more at here and now, for the organized workers of the craft or industry, mainly in terms of higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions, regardless of the welfare of the workers outside the particular organic group, and regardless, in general, of political and social considerations, except insofar as these bear directly upon its own economic ends. It is conservative in the sense that it professes belief in natural rights, and accepts as inevitable, if not as just, the existing capitalistic organization, and the wage system, as well as existing property rights and the



binding force of contract. It regards unionism mainly as a bargaining institution (Hoxie, 1966, p. 45).

Social unionism is an expression of a contradiction within advanced capitalism. With proletarianization, individualism would break down and workers would begin to think and act as a class and in doing so lay the groundwork for a socialist movement. They would represent a transition from individualized struggle aimed at preserving precapitalist individual autonomy to collective struggle aimed at class control of economic and social life (Lembecke, 1988, p. 157). Social unionism is a concept that contributes ideas and perspectives for the good of the community, the industry and the nation. The goal of social unionism is to pursue the public good through political, social, and economic reform. Since the early 1930's, some North American trade union leaders disowned socialism in favour of modern business unions. The American Federation of Labor did not envision trade unions as a tool for social change. They thought unions could not function without political freedom, and viewed capitalism as the basis for that freedom. American Federation of Labor business unionism is ideological to the point that it supports the capitalist system.

For example, the movement of many plants from highly industrialized states to the southern United States tends to

strengthen the capitalists' hands vis-a-vis the unions, eleven of the seventeen southern states have right-to-work laws, only because the unions' ability to follow and check corporate moves have been curtailed. Capital mobility, as a strategy in the class struggle, is viable only to the extent the working class capacities to follow are blocked.

The complaint from the Canadian union leadership was that the American union leadership was assuming a sense of complacency and adherence to the status quo, and were oblivious to the significance of the give-backs in the 1980's. They lacked social vision, a dynamic thrust that should characterize a progressive modern labour movement. The old AFL had never incorporated any general conceptions of social development and class relations. It had scoffed at any ideas of social reform. Its preference was to fight for immediate gains in wages. The American leadership had not broken with the fundamental ideology of the American Federation of Labor. American labour had operated without a theory of its own, having borrowed from alien sources. The American leadership had depended upon bureaucratic expediency as their guide. They were content to enjoy the ease of the moment without troubling themselves either with the discontents of the rank and file or the perils of the future. Like all pragmatists they were provincial and short-sighted. Pragmatism is not a working class philosophy. It is essentially the theory of

middle class progressivism, whose basic ideas do not extend beyond reforming the structure of capitalism. Unlike the AFL, the Congress of Industrial Organizations was an organization built from the ground up. Its beginnings were rooted in the rank and file. Its goals were the pursuit of political, economic, and social reform for the working class.

The Canadian leadership of the UAW contended that the American leadership, instead of remaining a maverick force for change, had become too responsible, adverse to struggling with the corporations, sluggish to new ideas, practical rather than idealistic, legalistic rather than militant, more conformist than anti-conformist. The ideology of the American union leadership was to transform the union into an instrument to advance corporate objectives, as witnessed when in 1981, UAW Vice-President Mark Steppe was in charge of selling the Chrysler concessions agreement to the rank and file (Moody, 1988, p.166). Business unionism brought with it the routinization of collective bargaining through the establishment of long term contracts. It established an administration apparatus that supported the power of the leadership and increased its independence of the rank and file. The antithesis of routine business unionism is social unionism, perceived to be represented by Robert White by Canadian labour.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE UAW INTERNATIONAL

### (1) International Unionism

The history of Canadian auto workers affiliating with International Unions dates back to 1928. American auto unions first began organizing members in 1920-21. Prominent among the new industrial unions in Canada, was the Auto-Workers Industrial Union of Canada. It was originally based in Windsor and Walkerville, Ontario. To combat speedups, wage cuts and attempts by the corporations to set up company unions, the Auto-Workers Industrial Union joined forces with General Motors workers of Oshawa. A strike over wage cuts took place at General Motors, and after a week it ended with no wage cuts imposed. After the union organized into a federal union with 4,200 members it was granted a charter in 1928 by the American Federation of Labor. When the Oshawa auto workers originally joined the AFL, they had been assured by the leadership that the local union could function as an industrial local union.

On November 2, 1928, the AFL headquarters in Washington ordered the local union in Oshawa to split into crafts. During that period craft unionism, as opposed to industrial unionism, was the basic policy of the AFL (Dulles and Dubofsky, 1984, p.249). The workers of the Auto-Workers Industrial Union refused to comply with the orders from

Washington. The workers refused to pay their dues dollar, and ended their relationship with the AFL; henceforth they paid their dues to the Auto-Workers Industrial Union in Canada.

(ii) Union Recognition

A strike that changed the labour movement significantly in Ontario was the General Motors Strike in Oshawa in 1937. On April 8th, 4,000 workers went on strike for a forty hour week, time and one half for overtime, recognition of union shop stewards, and recognition of the United Automobile Workers of America as their bargaining agent. Ontario Premier Mitchell Helpburn intervened in the strike by bringing in the Provincial Police to break it up. The strikers received such a show of solidarity across the country that General Motors was forced to end the strike. This show of militancy by the workers persuaded General Motors to give in to the demands of the workers. This was the first protracted and successful strike carried out by the United Automobile Workers Union in Canada. The International United Automobile Workers union played a role in collective bargaining in Canada up until 1984.

(iii) The Rand Formula

Of note is the strike against Ford Motor Company in Windsor, Ontario on September 12, 1945. The duration of this strike was ninety-nine days. At issue was union security. The UAW

just completed negotiations with Ford in Detroit. The company was unwilling to recognize the union at Ford of Canada.

The Canadian Labour Congress, the federal government and provincial authorities attempted to move either side but were unsuccessful. Both sides agreed to an arbitrator and Justice Ivan Rand of the Supreme Court of Canada persuaded the union and the company to agree to a compromise settlement which was to set the precedent for collective bargaining for the next generation. It gave the union recognition and a compulsory dues check-off system by the company in return for a no-strike clause that weakened the bargaining power of the union during the term of the agreement (Williams,1975,p.171). The Rand formula, however, restrained direct floor action by workers by removing their right to strike during the life of the contract, severely hindering attempts to resolve grievances. Thus, the individualizing of grievances bottled them up in the legal machinery (Rinehart,1987,p.64). The union leadership took other steps towards harmonizing labour-management relations but put further restrictions on the membership. In the General Motors 1950 contract negotiations, the company was pushing for a more comprehensive restructuring of its relations with the UAW. The company conceded to union demands of company paid pensions, health care coverage, reduction in the work week hours, and extension of the Annual Improvement Factor into the Canadian contracts. In exchange,

however, the company demanded a five year agreement which was readily accepted by the union leadership, though there was discontent within the membership who viewed the agreement as a sellout (Yates, 1988, p.199). The Ford Motor Company in the United States attempted to open the existing contract hoping to attain a similar agreement from the UAW. The militant rank and file rejected the five year agreement, and in its place won a ten cent an hour increase (Yates, 1988, p.201).

Throughout the 1950's the UAW International Union fought to reduce Region 7 (Canadian Region) to a one-party union and to rid the region of the many different factions in the local unions. The 1950's and 1960's were difficult times for the Canadian autoworkers. The boom and bust of the auto companies created periods of layoffs and seasonal variances in workers income. A high degree of rank and file militancy was prevalent at this time. Working conditions in the plants hindered the efforts of the UAW to establish stable relations with the auto companies because of the many wildcat strikes by the rank and file.

At the conclusion of the 1950 contracts and the opening of regular negotiations, the UAW leadership was confronted with resistance from the rank and file. At Ford there had been thirty-four work stoppages within a matter of weeks due to the implementation of forced overtime and assembly line speedups.

To protest the firing of thirty-two workers the membership instigated an illegal walkout (Yates,1988,p.201). Walter Reuther, then President of the UAW, intervened, and his main objective was to force the Canadian auto workers to abide by his policy on collective bargaining procedure and strikes (Yates,1988,p.202). Reuther, Emil Mazey, Secretary of the UAW, and Rys M. Sale, Ford President, laid blame for the wildcat strikes on a handful of communists (Yates,1988,p.202). The popular political stance in those years was to place responsibility for these kinds of actions on communist agitators, and not address the working conditions and the grievances of the workers (Ibid,1988,p.202).

#### INTERNATIONAL POLICIES ON STRIKES

At a 1952 quarterly meeting of the UAW Canadian Council, Regional Director George Burt, in his report to the delegates, recommended that a policy on strikes be adopted to conform to the Constitution of the International Union. This was Reuther's policy on bargaining and strike procedures. This policy, Burt stated, would stop the "undemocratic practice of wildcat strikes." The resolution also committed the union leadership to the active prevention of wildcat strikes (Yates,1988,p.204). It was resisted by the left-wing anti-Reuther faction of the Canadian Council, but it was passed by the majority of the Council delegates.



In 1954, The Ford Motor Company constructed a new assembly plant in Oakville, Ontario. Although the company recognized UAW Local 707 as the bargaining agent for that membership, the company refused to accept the local under the UAW Ford master agreement that covered all Ford workers in Canada. The UAW struck Ford for one hundred and nine days. At this time George Burt requested support from the International union. The International union, with some assistance from the Ontario provincial government authorities, was able to terminate the strike. UAW Local 707 was brought into the master agreement. It was the militancy of the rank and file that was instrumental in their winning their demands from the company. The regional director's request for International union assistance in settling collective bargaining disputes set a precedent that would last until 1979 (Yates, 1988,p.212).

The International union was becoming politically concerned with the mounting opposition against its administration. Fearing that the anti-Reuther faction in the Canadian union would gain support, the International strategically moved to gain tighter control over the Canadian region through the Director, George Burt (Yates,1988,p.215). The International union warned Burt to clean up the anti-administration politics in the region or this would be his last term as regional director. During local union elections many anti-

administration supporters were defeated, but not all. Allegations of interference in local union elections were directed at the regional director. These political actions by the administration helped defeat many incumbents but many of the stronger leaders survived the purge.

#### (1) Communist Affiliations

The International union anticipated a difficult strike with General Motors in the pending 1955 collective bargaining negotiations, and as part of the union's strategy, Walter Reuther was proposing that all UAW members be assessed a five dollar increase in their dues to cover the cost of a long strike. The strike fund in those years, \$25 million, did not compare with the strike fund of 1990, which totalled \$890 million. This proposal was met with strong resistance from UAW local union leaders in Canada who opposed control of the Canadian region as exhibited by the International union. At the UAW Canadian District Council March meeting, the regional director branded those opposed to the dues increase as nationalists and allies of the communist party (Yates, 1988, p. 214). Attacking the opposition delegates as supporters of the communist party was a useful weapon in this internal struggle because it put anti-Reuther opponents on the defensive and united his local union leadership supporters.

Unable to reach an agreement with General Motors, union

members walked off the job at midnight on September 18, 1955. As the strike progressed the International union leadership was meeting with strong resistance from UAW Local 222 members in Oshawa because the union was not addressing their backlog of grievances. In a statement by the UAW leadership the local union officers were publicly denounced for prolonging the strike and were accused of being dominated by the Communist Party, and "totalitarian, power-hungry union leaders". The International leadership took it upon itself to isolate the Oshawa local from the main bargaining talks. Leonard Woodcock, Vice-President and Director responsible for the General Motors Division of the UAW, was asked by the Canadian director to intercede in the negotiations. After one hundred and forty-eight days on the picket line the members voted to settle the strike (Yates, 1988, p. 217).

Concerned by the length of the strike with General Motors, the leadership of the UAW, seeking to control the militancy demonstrated by the rank and file during the long strike, restricted strikes to economic ends only, and forced the Canadian membership to comply with the new set of rules and regulations. Strike authorization could only be sanctioned by the union's International Executive Board. Compounding the growing nationalist opposition to the UAW International union was the developing resentment around the failure of the union leadership to convince governments in Canada and the U.S. of

the threat to their jobs by the importation of Japanese cars into the domestic market. At the request of the Canadian director, Reuther and Woodcock were invited to speak at a UAW Canadian Council Meeting and at several local union membership meetings. In their talks they admonished the nationalists and urged support for the Reuther administration. The support came when many local unions mounted candidates in their next local union elections, defeating many anti-administration members and electing Reuther supporters (Yates, 1988, p. 273). With the elimination of the opposition through the electoral process, a further move was made to purge local unions of officers unfavourable to the International administration.

On February 4, 1960, five years after the 1955 General Motors strike, a member of Local 222 Oshawa stood up at a membership meeting and accused local union officers of collaborating with the Communist Party of Canada during the long strike. The International union seized upon this and with the evidence of one member laid charges of "conduct unbecoming a union officer", against the leadership of UAW Local 222, Oshawa and Local 199, St. Catharines. Using McCarthyite tactics in exhorting guilt by association, an International officer and several local union leaders were committed to a union trial under the Constitution of the UAW. A trial committee was struck by the UAW Executive Board, who were all Americans, and the proceedings were scheduled to be held at the Royal York

Hotel in Toronto, Ontario (Toronto Star, Feb.4, 1960). On May 2, 1960 the committee rendered its decision. With regard to the local union officers, there was no substantial corroboration of the charges..... there was however substantial evidence that the International representative had held meetings with leaders of the Communist Party during the prolonged strike..... the official was deemed ineligible to hold any office within the UAW (UAW document, May 2, 1960).

There were other incidents of International union meddling in Canadian union affairs. In the McDonald Douglas aircraft strike in 1971, the formal contract offer was rejected on two occasions by the local union membership. Because the local union refused to conduct a secret ballot vote the International union withdrew strike pay and ordered the workers to return to their jobs (Yates,1988,p.380). Another conflict of note was the General Motors incident at Ste. Therese, Quebec. French speaking members had requested that their contracts be translated into the French language. Also, French members wanted the supervisors to communicate in their official language. The UAW International did not consider these requests to be important issues and ignored them. Failure of the local union to address these issues and also to resolve several outstanding grievances prompted the rank and file militants to occupy the plant. The seige commenced on August 28, 1976 and lasted for eight days. During that

period the company management spread rumours the insurgent group was being influenced by outside communist agitators and other malcontents. In the eyes of the rank and file workers the local had become impotent and unable to resolve their problems. The local was under tremendous pressure from the International union to end this dispute. The local hired a hall and the majority of members present voted to return to work with the assurance given by the local union that the reinstatement of those fired or suspended would be a major bargaining issue in the forthcoming negotiations. What this amounted to was a total capitulation by the local union leadership on every important issue which had been raised either before or during the shutdown (Johnson, W., Our Generation, Vol. 11-no.4).

## LABOUR AND POLITICS IN THE UNITED STATES

Roosevelt's New Deal program became a rallying point for all the leftists in the labour movement. His policies promised to achieve long sought social reforms. Socialist trade unions in the United States deserted the socialist movement in favour of Roosevelt's Democratic Party. It is coincidental that Roosevelt's New Deal program occurred at the same time the Communist Party adopted the Popular Front Line. The main feature of the Popular Front Line was the involvement of rank and file in committees, caucuses, political campaigns, and social causes in the community. This popular front style of protest activity declined precipitously with the elimination of the left progressive catalysts at the grass roots level (Halpern,p.269). Labour recognized that the gains won through economic action could only be kept secure through effective participation in the political arena, and socialism was not the vehicle that would attain these ends.

In 1938, Walter Reuther, a long time member of the Socialist Party, withdrew his membership from that party when he supported Democrat Frank Murphy for Governor of Michigan. In the late 1940's the American auto workers and the Congress of Industrial Organizations repeatedly pressured Reuther to adopt an independent political policy for the labour movement.

Reuther repeatedly sidestepped any commitment to support a labour party. A minority of delegates presented a resolution on that subject at the 1951 convention in Cleveland, Ohio, and Reuther resisted with this argument:

We are all opposed to political hacks and we are all opposed to corruption and compromise; but it is not a matter of principle that is being debated in these two resolutions. The division is not in principle, it is in strategy, in tactics and this is the keynote of the future development of American political power with respect to the labour movement. So, if you pass the minority resolution you will feel noble, but you will not advance the political struggle to build labour's political power in America. Let us not be generals without an army."  
(UAW Convention minutes 1951)

Although Reuther claimed to be no compromiser or friend of corrupt politicians, his assessment of the prevailing situation compelled him to favour the continuation of the old class collaboration with the Democratic Party and block the initiation of a socialist labour party. Reuther's approach to politics was completely pragmatic. Labour should work within the existing party structure, which in the circumstances of the time meant support for the Democrats (Dulles and Dubofsky, 1984, p.357).

In more recent years, Canadian unionists have been more militant in the face of demands for concessions by corporations, rejecting the bureaucratic posture of American labour leaders. The restructuring of the assembly of automobiles and the introduction of "employee involvement



programs" has significantly altered the traditional method of negotiating with the large automobile corporations in North America, Ford introduced the Escort, a global car assembled in a North American plant, but containing parts and components manufactured in Third World plants. The North American corporate approach was to focus on competitiveness, using components of the Japanese style of worker involvement in North American methods for creating more worker involvement. When the U.S. automobile corporations began to talk about the implementation of a new approach to collective bargaining and a restructuring of the workplace, they wanted to develop the style of management and team concept that was prevalent in Japanese auto plants. The International UAW and General Motors entered into an agreement for the new General Motors Saturn plant, "Forming the Future: The Marriage of People and Technology at Saturn", March 29, 1990. This contract was signed by the UAW prior to the hiring of any work force. The future members of that local union had no participation in the development of the agreement or its ratification. Workers contend(ed) that advanced mechanization could have positive effects if it helped improve working conditions, (but) not if it only served the purpose of increased profits (A. Tourraine, p.153). Technological developments in communication and transportation have made the location of manufacturing in the Third World profitable, and that manufacturing is done in factories located in Free Trade Zones and are imported into

North America with tariff or other barriers.

The first industrial revolution and its technical innovations, such as the harnessing of steam power, brought with it a set of social and economic changes. The most important was the migration of agricultural workers into the constantly expanding industrial sector. Industrial capitalism brought about social changes more shattering in their consequences than in any other period in the entire history of humankind. The attributes of modern society are seen as issuing directly from the smokestacks, machine tools and computers (Braverman, 1974, p.16).

Technology has been a key determining factor in shaping the social structure of advanced societies. Changes in production processes, telecommunications, and transportation meant that large corporations could use skilled and technical labour for some processes in advanced countries, and unskilled, low paid labour for routine processes in the southern United States and Third World countries. The key words in the automobile corporations during the concession era were productivity and Quality of Work Life programs. The idea of quality of life programs was for workers to redefine their jobs, and how best to reorganize the workplace, and how best to identify with company goals.

The U.S. corporate strategy was to trade off "employee involvement programs" and concessions for "job security". Employee involvement programs became popular in the workplace in the late 1970's and early 1980's for precisely the same reasons that corporations began to demand concessions from workers; to involve the union in improving the productivity of workers and the competitive position of the corporations, the industry, and the nation in the interest of capital at the expense of workers (Moody,1988,p.187). Job security meant longer periods of agreements, a ten year pact at the American Motors plant in Wisconsin and a similar ten year agreement with security guards at Chrysler Corporation. Competition from off-shore producers had a profound effect on the domestic market and the morale of the rank and file. Reluctant to fight the import problem, the union leadership resigned itself to deal with the problem at the negotiating table. These schemes will not make the North American industry more competitive because industry has not addressed the concerns of industrial progress. Such development could be attributed to the conservative ideology of the union leaders and a movement to the right of centre. Unions also have been unable to combat the schemes of the corporations of introducing new technological sophistication, such as VDT, video display terminals and downsizing the corporations. Although there is a certain amount of capitulation by the union leaders, the rank and file are showing militancy in fighting such changes.

The philosophy of militant industrial unionism has the goal of furthering the rights and interests of workers with respect to wages, hours of work and working conditions. Emphasis is on the need for solidarity in the struggle for decent working conditions. When there is a failure by management or workers' unions to respond favourably in recognition of the workers' demands, they have resorted to wildcat strikes and the takeover of factories. Employers are reluctant to use scabs or try to run the plant because of the organization position and stability of major industrial unions. The wildcat strike is a form of struggle directed against the practical consequences of the union leadership as well as the employer.

Since the early 1970's the union leadership has switched from a militant industrial union to a business union philosophy. In exchange for one year agreements which were a bothersome procedure to the corporations, the UAW offered "predictability in labour relations", long term contracts, the first five year agreement at General Motors, a union guarantee of stability for company operations, no strike during the life of the agreement, wage increases tied to productivity increases, and a cap on the COLA program (Laker, p.58). The UAW leadership in America had become, in a very real sense, a part of the corporate establishment. Trade union leaders in the United States accepted the capitalist system as given, while others

tended to subscribe to a belief in the ultimate achievement of an altogether social order. Where Walter Reuther was more the revolutionist, a revolutionist in the sense that he fought to implement political and social policies with the aim of eliminating social problems. Leonard Woodcock was more the corporate style. For example, the Canadian industrial unions on a national basis, had supported the social democratic party. Where American trade union leaders generally believed and proclaimed that there existed a fundamental identity of interests between capitalist management and labour; most other trade union leaders in other capitalist countries did not (Miliband,1987,p.144). In the United States House of Representatives and the Senate, elected representatives had always been men of strong biases in favour of private enterprise. American labour had always had to depend on such legislators who, for the most part, were not strong advocates of the trade union movement (Ibid,1987,p.149).

Institutionalizing labour-management cooperation was a strategy the Chrysler Corporation was planning to implement with the union. One of the stipulations in the Chrysler bailout agreement was the granting to the union of a seat on the Company's Board of Directors, to share power in the company decision making. It was unlikely that any real power changed hands as a result (Moody,1988,p.190). The union, when it accepted a directorship on the board, supported the notion

that the union had become part of the control system of management. Union officials argued that this collaborative relationship with the corporate powers was in the interest of the union's members. However, in such a position, union leaders became vulnerable to corporate demands for concessions, deferrals and the control of workers.

#### INTERNATIONAL CONTROL OF UNIONS

International unions in Canada have a long history dating back to the early nineteenth century. At the turn of the century, industrial unions in Canada were eager to establish their international links. The idea was to formulate a fraternal relationship which they did, but it subsequently became a relationship of domination. Throughout the history of international unions down to the present, they had little or no membership in any foreign country save Canada (Lipton, 1967, p.24). Those Canadian unions which affiliated with American unions in 1906, soon came to realize that progress in social legislation, human rights, and management relations were practically non-existent. Also health and safety in the industrial plants was totally ignored. Industrial accidents were higher in American plants than in any other industrialized country. A U.S. newspaper wrote in 1913; "With every 16 ticks of the clock a worker in our country is injured in an industrial accident. Every quarter

of an hour a worker is killed." In 1913, The Industrial Banner, a socialist press, established in London, Ontario wrote at that time, "life is much better protected" in England and Germany than in the United States (Lipton, 1967, p.133). However, when the labour movement in Canada was beginning to emerge, it was met with resistance from hostile employer groups.

The attitude towards unions and strikes was significantly different in the United States and Canada. Corporate rulers of the United States were then among the most brutal the world had ever known, employing soldiers and company guards to kill strikers' families at Ludlow, Colorado in May 1914, and other incidents. The Industrial Banner wrote at that time: "Men, women and children were shot attempting to escape or were roasted alive." (Lipton, 1967, p.133). Another factor was the extraordinary weight of capital in the United States relative to labour (Lipton, 1967, p.134). Business leaders and financiers such as Carnegie, Gould, and Rockefeller had formed corporations that controlled the industrial sector of the United States. Monopoly was the goal of these industrialists. A complacent government and complacent courts had given free reign to the laissez-faire attitude and policies which rapidly created a concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few (Dulles, Dubofsky, 1984, p.91). Canada had its financiers as well, Timothy Eaton, George Weston and F. P. Taylor.

At the turn of the century, the United States union movement was lagging behind the labour movements in other countries. Associated with this was the rapport that had been established between craft union officials and big business. The AFL had no clearcut policy on political action, union officials tended to agree with the government's policy on foreign affairs. Union dissidents opposed the AFL's stand on these issues and constantly identified themselves with the mass of exploited workers. They organized the unorganized, fought bitter strikes, and at the 1912 AFL convention were able to win a resolution endorsing socialism. In a way, this testifies to a progressive trend in the United States trade union movement, but it never became the dominant trend. Even if it had, this did not cancel a problem inherent in international unionism, inherent in a situation where Canada became dependent on the ebb and flow of events in a foreign country (Lipton, 1967, p.135).

Business unionism remained dominant in the union movement in the United States. Although international affiliation brought with it bargaining strength to Canadian unions, internal relations were not always smooth. The Canadian branches of the unions were administered by a centralized bureaucratic structure and were run with a firm hand. Canadians did not even have control over the administration of their own union



dues.

Larger Canadian affiliates of the UAW and the United States steel unions had officials elected at conventions held in the United States. They allowed for a separate Canadian District or regional office and some independence. Resistance against international union dominance began to manifest itself in the early 1970's. The Canadian labour movement had reached new heights of membership in the 1970's - close to 40 percent of the labour force. Starting in the late 1950's the extent of unionization in the United States first stagnated and then started to decrease, while all measures of union involvement in labour relations in Canada began a steady increase which continues (Huxley, Kettler, Struthers, 1986,p.113).

As part of their initiative during this period, Canadian unions were striving for more independence and autonomy, a new Canadian nationalism was being echoed across Canada, and there was a mood of discontent that permeated Canadian unions. They were angry about the poor service that the American internationals were handing out (Heron,1989,p.149).

In the 1970's there was a noticeable trend for some private sector unions to break away from their international affiliations. In 1972, the communication workers, in 1974, the flour, cereal, soft drink and distillery workers, the

paper workers, and the energy and chemical workers in 1980. In 1985 the Canadian Region of the autoworkers withdrew from their international union. In 1986 the Canadian sector of the Wood Workers Union of America took the same route (Heron, 1989, p. 154).

Canadianization of the labour movement began as a combination of discontent with American domination and resentment against bureaucratic centralism. Control of the administration of the affiliates in Canada had become concentrated in the hands of a few. This was accompanied by a reduction of independence of autonomy for local unions, in the process of decision making. In some local unions the polemics were over issues of nationalism and for greater autonomy to administer their own affairs, to be masters of their own destiny. Also, the internationalization of the economy gave capital an almost unbeatable advantage over labour: capital is mobile, while labour is not. Global corporations can say to their employees - accept our terms or we will relocate. It became obvious to Canadian union officials that economic and political policies, in this new era, of foreign countries, could have a profound effect on the traditional concept of collective bargaining.

#### SIMILARITIES

During the 1960's, labour leaders in the United States and

Canada bore many of the same characteristics. Walter Reuther and the United Automobile Union were among the first unionists to recognize the problems of the internationalization of the auto labour market and to work towards solutions that would recognize common interests (Barnard,1983,p.167). When the U.S.-Canadian auto-pact was signed in 1965, it instituted a system that enabled car manufacturers to make their operations more efficient, American car manufacturers were dominating the North American car market, and the prospects for continued growth appeared to be unlimited. However, the quiet invasion of Japanese cars began to slowly erode the domestic car market in North America. Japanese auto makers were absorbing a large portion of the domestic car market. During 1974, they produced seven million cars and sold only a million and a half for domestic purposes. To compete, auto plants in North America introduced new technological changes, robotics, restructuring of plant facilities, computer systems, and the team concept.

In the industrial sector changes were extraordinarily swift and comprehensive. In later years, plant closures by multinational corporations drastically reduced the work force, plants were relocated to Third World countries and workers in those countries were subjected to the lowest of wages. This competition not only influenced wages and prices, but it also called into question the effectiveness of traditional

management and industrial relations (R. Marshall, 1986, p.133). Pattern bargaining in the North American automobile industry was originally designed to limit the corporations ability to bargain separately with local unions and prohibit whipsawing (raising wages by playing one employer against another) and to shift production between plants. Pattern bargaining also allowed for the common establishment of wage rates, work standards and benefit packages. However, the competition between workers and plant bidding for jobs began to surface in the early 1980's, when the monopolistic position of American automobile companies in the market began to erode from the onslaught of offshore competition. Traditional wages and benefits that had been established in agreements were now in jeopardy.

To fight the competitiveness of foreign manufacturers, North American corporations asked for concessions from the union and its members. Historically, workers have limited input into the production methods and even less in corporate decision making. The union leadership was making all the decisions that directly affected the daily lives of the rank and file. There were many legislative differences between the American and Canadian governments; universal medicare in Canada, none in the United States, labour legislation, American workers had the right to strike during the life of an agreement, Canadians didn't. Although there were many similarities in the approach

to collective bargaining, the Canadian leadership was becoming uneasy with the acceptance of watered down agreements in the United States for fear that these demands by the corporations would slip across the border.

#### DISPARITIES

According to Seymour Martin Lipset, out of the American revolution two nations were born. The two North American nations, the United States and Canada are the wealthiest and most productive industrialized countries in the world. The decline of North American production as a proportion of the worldwide product and the growth of the foreign trade deficit in the United States led some people to worry about the weakening of its international impact. Canadians became concerned as to what might happen to their universal health care, and other social benefits that were a part of collective bargaining. In the late seventies, there were a series of circumstances that became evident and brought the different approach to labour-economic problems between the American and the Canadian leadership to the forefront. These circumstances were the introduction of wage and benefit concessions and the fundamental change in collective bargaining.

The sudden disclosure by the managers of Chrysler Corporation that it was on the brink of bankruptcy sent economic shock waves throughout the auto industry. An arrangement was worked

out between the American Government and the Corporation which eventually involved the workers. In order for the American Government to provide loan guarantees to the Corporation, the workers had to give up wages and other forms of benefits, personal paid holidays, COLA adjustments (Congressional Hearings on the Act to Provide Chrysler Corporation Loan Insurance 1979,1980). In the words of Douglas Fraser, "It was the worst contract I ever took part in". The American workers were asked to make concessions worth two hundred million dollars in absolute concessions which were not recoverable (Congressional Hearings,p.1002-27). The American workers, chose to accept a more conservative agreement in return for their jobs. The workers had to give up hard won benefits because of bad corporate decisions. Having given up these concessions, was there any guarantee that they, the workers, would have job security? Having given up wage increases and other monetary benefits, would the workers be compensated when the corporation fell on good times? What had become so significant about concessions in the eighties?

The first appeal for concessions by Chrysler Corporation was a demand to open the then existing contract, signed in 1979. A request to do this in January 1980 was accepted by the American workers but rejected by the Canadian rank and file. Many Canadian workers were not convinced that the corporation's cry of insolvency was legitimate. The other

contentious issue was the insistence of American lawmakers that Canadian workers must accept the same sacrifices as American workers. Frank LaSorda, President of UAW Chrysler Local 444 said in an interview, "Canadian workers should not be subject to demands of the American government." (Windsor Star, Wed. Jan. 8, 1980). In spite of opposition by the rank and file, the Canadians accepted certain concessions.

During the 1982 negotiations, the Corporation insisted that it had no money for the workers and further stated that any increase in wages would place the company in a serious financial condition. The Canadian workers refused to accept this premise and struck the company. When the strike was finally terminated after a five and one half week strike, the Canadian workers had won wage increases of \$1.15 per hour. Subsequently the American workers settled for a \$.75 cent per hour increase. The outcome of this strike strained the relationship between the union leaders on both sides of the border as well as the two memberships. The International leadership was reluctant during negotiations to demand a decent wage increase for its membership because the corporation was not in a financial position to do so. The major difference which caused the wide gulf between members on both sides of the border was the fact that there were very large numbers of workers in America on layoff, 29,000 at Chrysler, 60,000 at General Motors and Ford, (U.S. Congress

Committee Report,1980), and also the manner in which the concessions strategy had been approached. Besides the concessions, corporations in the U.S. had begun to downsize their operations. This included the combining of operations and closing plants. The American workers had become afraid of demanding too much because they had so many workers on layoff. In Canada the layoffs were not as dramatic and members were more adversarial in their approach to collective bargaining due to a tougher economic climate. Mortgage rates were high and inflation was way above the norm.

As tersely stated by the Canadian UAW in 1982:

Not only are labour costs dramatically below the American worker (\$10,000 on an annual basis) at a time when corporations have made labour costs the issue, but we also face an inflation issue that is running about one half times the American rate. Our mortgage costs are higher (shorter term with no interest deductibility), the average cost of consumer durables is about 20% higher in Canada and our wage and benefit package is closer to the manufacturing average than is the case in America.(UAW. 19 Canada Publication).

It would seem that the American leadership had lost its profile as an aggressive champion of the auto workers. They were acting more like a group of bureaucrats intent on delaying what they could in what they perceived to be very lean times. During the 1984 negotiations with General Motors in Canada, the Canadian leadership raised accusations that the International union officials had interfered with and meddled in the negotiations. Canadian Director Robert White also



stated that the International had threatened to withdraw strike assistance if the Canadian Region did not accept the pattern set by the International in the United States (John Deverell, Toronto Star, Dec.8,1984). There are conflicting messages regarding this issue, because there is evidence that the International officials were requested to intercede by White on behalf of the Canadian bargaining committee, (Detroit News, Dec.16,1984), to get the company to agree to the Canadian terms. On December 10, 1984, Robert White went to the International Executive Board with a set of demands that would allow the Canadian union to establish a similar but autonomous union in Canada with the same type of structure, and access to the strike fund. These demands by White for autonomy were so sweeping that the International refused and with a vote of 24 to 1 the Canadian leadership was sent on its way to form its own union.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BUREAUCRACY AND THE RANK AND FILE

#### (1) One-Party Rule

The ideology of the union as a business led in turn to the conclusion that it should be run like one from the top down (Moody, 1988, p. 56). Business unionism has been around since the turn of the century. Most AFL unions had practised it for years when most of the top leaders of the AFL repudiated socialism. As teamster President Dave Beck asked in the 1950's,

Unions are big business. Why should truck drivers and bottle washers be allowed to make big decisions affecting union policy? Would any corporation allow it? (Moody, 1988, p. 57)

The need for bureaucracy in trade unions comes from both internal and external sources. Unions such as steel workers and the auto workers, which bargain with a few gigantic corporations must establish a union authority structure which parallels that of the large corporations. Unions are involved in negotiating wages and benefits for the rank and file, processing compensation cases, pension plans, members' grievances. To carry out these tasks unions must establish administrative systems to process these responsibilities (Lipset, 1967, p. 359).

The Congress of Industrial Organizations which developed during the 1950's was a very different organization from that which fought for recognition during the stormy forties. In virtually every major CIO union, gains that bureaucrats had accomplished gradually in the 1940's were rapidly used to convert the unions into one-party or one-man rule. Most major industrial unions once established, moved to defuse any potential opposition, and the central office limited any local autonomy. That is to say there was little for the local union office to do but to administer the collective agreement. Phillip Murray, by amending the International Constitution, made the United Steelworkers of America the sole contracting party in all contracts. Also all check-off dues were first sent to their International office and then distributed to the local unions. Other unions such as the United Rubber Workers, National Maritime Workers, United Mine Workers, all fit the new one-party mold (Moody, 1988,p.49-50). The last vestige of opposition was expelled, crushed or co-opted in a period of two or three years.

The United Auto workers presented the most dramatic example of this process because its internal political life structure, from its birth in 1935 to the end of the 1940's was rich and democratic. In most CIO unions, bureaucratic control over union administration and collective bargaining expanded during

the war. But in the UAW, the local unions were alive with independent leadership, political currents and national caucuses. Every union policy had to be justified and fought for at annual conventions, and convention debates were often long and heated. But that all became passe. When Walter Reuther took over the helm of the UAW, factionalism ceased to be a preoccupation.

(ii) Union Bureaucracy

Richard Lester, in his book As Unions Mature, viewed bureaucracy in unions as an inevitable consequence of union complexity. Lester described this maturation process in the same vein as Michels;

As a union's curve begins to level off, subtle psychological changes tend to take place. The turbulence and enthusiasm of youth, the missionary zeal of a movement slow down to a moderate pace. Increasingly, decisions are made centrally, as a political machine is entrenched, as the channels are more tightly controlled from the top, and as a reliance on staff specialists grows.....as the organization enlarges, the problems of management multiply and the emphasis shifts from organization to administration, negotiation and contract enforcement. (Lester, 1958, p.160-1)

Early literature on the CIO has revealed that the leadership began to bureaucratize the organization in the 1930's and 1940's. It also fought off opposition, provided tighter central control, limited local union autonomy, and minimized rank and file participation (Cory, L & L. Institutionalized Conservatism in the CIO, Adolph Germer: A Case Study, Labour

History, fall 1972,p.494,Davis 61)). When President Roosevelt implemented the New Deal, a government program to extend direct aid to agriculture, labour, and industry, the CIO and government officials worked hand in hand to promote responsible negotiated settlements in the industrial unions and moved to suppress the rampant use of wildcat strikes and sitdowns. Auto workers had learned from experience that they could not rely on mediation or presidential support to solve their problems and so they resisted efforts to end their strikes before victory had been won (Halpern,1988,p.20).

An indispensable treasury gave the union bureaucracy a decisive advantage over local unions and shop floor committees. The war years worked against the rank and file as bureaucracy was consolidated and war time labour shifted from collective bargaining at the local level to the level of the federal government, from the local unions and the shop floor (Moody,1988,p.29). Any rank and file interference such as illegal work stoppages was viewed by the government labour board as hostile action. After Pearl Harbor the UAW, with other unions, voluntarily pledged to forego strikes for the duration of the war. No authorized strikes by UAW members occurred during the war, although there were many wildcats (Barnard,1983,p.81).

Sumner Slichter, a Harvard economist, extolled the advantages

of bureaucratic authority in labour relations:

Because the officers of the union are both willing and better able than the rank and file to take account of the consequences of the union policies (on the competitive position of their employers), and because they attach less importance than the rank and file to immediate effects and more importance to long term results, unions are more successful in adjusting themselves to technological and market changes when the officers are permitted to make policies and negotiate agreements without ratification by the rank and file.

Phillip Murray of the Steelworkers and the CIO, Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and John L. Lewis of the Mine Workers Union all shared Slichter's view that authoritative leaders are better placed to deal with changing situations than the rank and file (Moody, 1988,p.29). Thus, union leadership began to run their unions in this manner.

#### (iii) Shop Floor Democracy

The U.S. federal government with the support of the CIO, established "Industrial Jurisprudence"; this was the four step grievance procedure that concluded with arbitration and strikes, and direct action by the workers was considered illegal. This system, accepted by the CIO leadership in 1942, differed drastically from the largely informal system of workplace negotiations, which, when issues were not resolved, would result in direct action by the workers. In implementing such a procedure the bureaucracy took away workers' authority in the workplace and also the workers' ability to defeat resistance and opposition. In the early struggles of the

unions the system of shop floor grievance settlement had been established. This system established a militant shop steward system that fought grievances on the shop floor. The importance of the shop floor system was that it was a factor in maintaining workers' strength. Before and after the Second World War, the Reuther caucus showed a greater willingness to favour plans for labour management co-operation and down play the importance of the UAW's traditional goal of establishing and maintaining a militant shop steward system to fight the shop floor grievance (Halpern, 1988, p.195). Removing this authority from the workplace, which was always the centre of resistance to bureaucracy and placing it in the hands of bureaucratic control severely undermined the militancy of the shop floor representatives.

Labour leaders like John L. Lewis, Sidney Hillman, Phillip Murray, and Walter Reuther were fully aware of the revolutionary mood of the workers and were determined to deflect it by bureaucratizing the CIO unions, and institutionalizing the grievance procedure to prevent direct action on the job (Marquart, 1975, p.125-26). Such a body of norms were built up after the war and the grievance procedure was incorporated into all the industrial contracts. As Faber stated in 1976:

Unions find it necessary to join with the company and the government to enforce labour discipline for workers who are continually revolting against company abuses. This system first accepted by the

CIO in 1942, deprived the rank and file of settling their disputes on the shop floor, which rested in the final analysis on the threat of confrontation. This system of industrial jurisprudence did not work favourably for either shop floor stewards or rank and file members.

As Lichenstein put it:

The system shifted disputes from the shop floor, where the stewards and work groups held the greatest leverage, to the realm of contractual interpretation, where the authority of management and the value of orderly procedure weighed more heavily. In the meantime - possibly several weeks - the discipline and authority of management remained intact.

#### CONCESSIONS: A POLITICAL ACT OR AN ECONOMIC ONE?

##### (1) Company's Demands For Concessions

In his speech given at the University of Virginia Law School in 1964, Walter Reuther said;

All industries, and all companies within an industry, do not enjoy the same economic advantages and profit ratios. We, the leadership, cannot blind ourselves to this fact at the bargaining table. If the employer prospers, we expect a fair share, and if the employer faces hard times, we expect to cooperate. Many of our local unions have foregone wage increases, cooperated in improving production schedules, raised money for the purchase of new equipment, and helped the hard pressed employer market his product. Willys, Chrysler, American Motors, Mack Truck, the Tool & Die Association of Detroit, and countless smaller concerns have benefitted from the sensible decisions of UAW members to make the concessions required by temporary business adversities. Our basic philosophy towards the employers we meet at the bargaining table is that we have a great deal more in common than we have in conflict and that, instead of waging a struggle to divide up scarcity, we ought to find ways of co-operating to create abundance and then intelligently find a way to share in that



abundance.

In their famous "capitalist manifesto" Fortune Magazine pointed out that in 1951,

the systems of private contractual relations between labour and capital, dependent on limited state intervention represented a particularly "American solution to the problems of class struggles and proletarian consciousness. (Davis,1988,p.102)

However, the spread of concessionary bargaining which followed the Chrysler give-backs in 1979 constituted a fundamental change in the labour-management climate of that era. John Dunlop, former Secretary of Labour of the United States, refused to acknowledge the hardening of management attitudes towards concessions. Quoted in Business Week, April 19, 1982 Dunlop said:"It is not a major new era and I am not willing to sign my name to it." (Business Week,1982, p.36). By signing the wage and benefit package in the early 1980's, the American union leadership demonstrated that wage and benefit bargaining was not a one way street. In industry after industry, traditionally hard won wage patterns that guaranteed contractual uniformity and preserved the effective solidarity between workers in different forms were being destroyed, their place being taken by savage new wage-cutting competition (Davis, 1988,p.103). The UAW, a strong international union with a reputation for militancy put contractual bargaining based on company performance and competitiveness ahead of the traditional pattern wage structure. Also, bidding wars were becoming a regular feature between industrial plants.

(iii) Whipsawing

Local unions opposed to concessions, tried to organize an opposition to concession bargaining, but the tactics of union bureaucracies produced a wave of majority acceptances at local union ratification meetings. In local unions at General Motors and Ford Motor which most strongly opposed concessions, the membership ratified concessionary contracts by only 52%, one of the closest big-three votes ever. In 1980 UAW organized companies demanded that local unions make concessions on work rules and working conditions, with the threat that if they did not comply the work would go elsewhere. This tactic emerged in the auto industry after the Chrysler bailout. Ford, for example, announced it would close one of its six stamping plants, they then went to all of the stamping plants and asked for changes in work rules and job descriptions for both production and skilled workers. The workers who were willing to give up the most concessions got the jobs. In these instances of whipsawing, the International union pushed for acceptance and the locals agree (Moody, 1989, p. 182). Bidding for jobs between plants became a regular feature of labour relations in the auto industry at the start of the 1980's. The decentralized American system became conducive to whipsawing (raising and lowering wages by playing one employer off against another or playing workers of different states and countries against each other)

(Marshall, Ray, 138-141 America, Japan Unions in Transition).

As one UAW official put it, the "threat to close plants was an effective psychological weapon". The large corporations pressured different plants and local unions into bidding wars against each other for jobs. The corporations were looking to cut labour costs at the expense of the workers and workers were giving in without receiving any return value (Moody, 1987, p.183). At General Motors, plants were placed on a "danger list" and were removed and substituted with another less cooperative plant when the workers agreed to cooperate with management (Mann, 1987, p.122). Corporate management soon learned that plant closings were a powerful weapon to enforce union compliance with corporate objectives (Mann, 1987, p.80).

The new capitalist agenda for collective bargaining in Canada resembled that of the United States, that is, concessions. Industries were requesting that unions open contracts and give concessions. In his book Hard Bargains, (1981) Robert White, Vice-President and UAW Director for Canada, in a discussion on concessions stated:

We can't accept anymore concessions. We can't let our members get into a bidding war for jobs and tear each other's throat out to see who can work the cheapest. That's not what unions are for (White, 1987, p.170).

He further stated that every agreement in the country could be targeted for concessions.

At the beginning of the 1980's Canadian auto workers were not experiencing the economic hardships that American workers were faced with. American workers were experiencing massive layoffs (300,000), and plant closures (Ginden, Summer, 189,p.65). Ginden attributed this to Canada's favourable model mix and relatively newer plants which left it less vulnerable to closures. The recession of the early 1980's affected both North American countries, but it was far deeper and broader based in Canada than in the United States. As a broad generalization, while the U.S. recession followed the pattern of a typical business cycle, the Canadian downturn was a serious stagflation, i.e., recession combined with cost-price inflationary pressures (Lipset,1986,p.429).

In the mid-1980's the subject matter of the collective bargaining process changed significantly in North America. The changing character of corporate negotiations in many respects altered the public image of some unions. Concessionary bargaining spread to both profitable and financially ailing firms alike. Many unions, unprepared for the competitive atmosphere, adopted the economic policy of granting concessions. The Teamsters Union granted across-the-board concessions, the United Steel Workers of America, in 1983, granted major steel firms a \$1.25 an hour wage cut and other benefits worth three billion dollars to the steel

corporations. Contrary to the wishes of the local union leadership, UAW officials in America authorized the opening of local union contracts. In some of those instances the top leadership of the unions were involved in granting concessions to corporations with little or no input from the rank and file. The UAW officials were not impelled nor inclined to strive to maintain pattern bargaining traditions. The deterioration of pattern bargaining began when business unionism became a cooperative partner in granting concessions to corporations. The combination of corporations and top union officials forced local unions to reopen agreements (February, 1982, General Motors, Mann, 1987, p. 80). The pressure from General Motors and from UAW president Douglas Fraser succeeded in reopening the 1982 contracts.

The Chrysler concessions agreement was more a political act than an economic one, yet the consequences of the act were profoundly economic. Chrysler Corporation was kept afloat by massive amounts of public resources. The Government could not afford to have all these people not working. There is a clear distinction between political and economic struggles in their purest sense. Political challenges are seen as against the state and could be seen as revolutionary. Economic challenges are seen as attempts to gain better working conditions within the framework of existing society, and they are generally directed at the owners of production. It is during a mass

strike that the political and economic distinctions break down. Mass strikes in these type of movements aim not just to win concessions for workers but to increase their power as well. Mass strikes are illegal acts, and at times are a challenge to the state, e.g. the Great Upheaval of 1877 in the United States, the Winnipeg General Strike, 1919 in Canada, and the Solidarity Movement in British Columbia, Canada in 1983, making the actions of workers political in its narrowest sense (Brecher, 1984, p. 241-2). During these mass strikes there is a strong sense of solidarity and unity.

This sense of unity was not embodied in any centralized plan or leadership, but in the feelings and actions of each participant. From the start the UAW leadership was more than willing to grant concessions and to fight hard to get their members to accept them. Do concessions save jobs or stop plant closures? The U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics showed that after seven years of concessionary bargaining in the industry there were no jobs saved. From December 1978 to December 1986 there was a drop of 180,500 workers. Between 1977 and 1981 seventeen tire plants were closed, United Steel Workers granted concessions and the U.S. Steel Company announced plans to close one third of its remaining steel capacity. Even after Chrysler had gained concessions and returned to profitability it closed several plants, leaving stranded those employees who had made sacrifices to save their

own jobs.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Opportunities For Change

According to Owen Bieber, President of the UAW,

At a time when we need even greater solidarity among workers and ever-increasing international cooperation among worker organizations throughout the world, the Canadian leadership has decided to travel in the opposite direction. (Bieber, Owen, Jan.4,1985)

Bieber further stated that the Canadian leadership allowed a rising tide of nationalism to blind them to the need for stronger ties among workers of all nations. Bieber, in making an attempt to understand Bob White's actions, could not determine just where White was coming from. White was threatening to wrap himself in the Canadian flag, as he did in the documentary film "Final Offer". Bieber admitted, "it would be difficult to counter such a move." (Bieber, Owen, Interview Feb.28,1991)

A major development occurred in the union movement in the early 1860's. Up until this period the union movement in Canada had been almost completely Canadian with no outside connections. The only exception was the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, a British organization with affiliates in Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston and Montreal. Among the first to affiliate with the American unions were the moulders in



Montreal in 1860. Also at that time small industrial units were eager to establish international connections. Fraternal relationships within these structures were not always smooth. Tension occasionally developed within international unions and between the national federations in each country (Lipton,1973,p.22). At the national level the American Federation of Labor consistently treated the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada as little more than a state federation, and from time to time cracked the whip to get the Congress in line with the policies of the AFL (Heron,1989,p.148).

In the 1950's the left wing caucus in the Canadian UAW, attacked the UAW International union for not addressing the day to day concerns of workers on the shop floor, especially the problem of assembly line speed-ups. Rising productivity grew out of new technological innovations. However, rising productivity also grew out of the intensification of labour, that is, new methods designed to increase productivity. In the 1950's industrial workers were subjected to much job scrutiny. Industrial engineers had become part of life of workers on the shop floor, creating conflicts over work loads which became an issue in a multitude of grievances and strikes (Lipton,1973,p.303). As Charles Brooks, President of Local 444 UAW argued, "Chrysler is trying to compete by using human hands." Collective agreements reflected a lack of regard for the inhuman workplace workers were subjected to on a daily

basis, and a cumbersome grievance procedure retarded a prompt reply to the issues (Yates,1988,p.267). Settlement of grievances had occurred much more quickly when annual contracts were negotiated. In the 1950's the UAW, Steel, and the Mine Workers Union, Meat Packers, moved to centralize control of collective bargaining and to extend one year agreements to three. Thus breaking the cyclical exercise of negotiating short term agreements. Longer term contracts slowed the process of grievance settlements.

An early and contentious issue between the Canadian UAW and the parent union in the United States was wage parity, that is, equality of wages between workers in the two countries. During the 1959 bargaining sessions with the Big Three automakers, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, wage parity was part of the union bargaining strategy. At the conclusion of the collective bargaining rounds with the automakers, the UAW had not been successful in negotiating wage parity. The demand had slipped into oblivion. In defense of these contracts George Burt, UAW Canadian Regional Director, struck out against American Capitalism, when he said;

I believe the only way we can defend ourselves against American Capitalism is through International unions such as ours...it seems to me that we are fighting world capital, but particularly American Capital which is responsible for most of our economic ills, but an attempt is being made by the left-wing caucus to side track us into believing that International unionism is responsible for our failure to obtain things from American employers (Yates,1988,p.168).

Throughout the history of the UAW International Union in Canada there were cries of anti-Americanism, nationalism, and anti-International union, mostly from the left wing faction of the union. When people of a nation are aspiring to identify with a particular territory and a feeling of self-determination, crying nationalism is a method of securing their political coherence and political autonomy. This is especially true when one foreign nation or organization is attempting to dominate another by economic exploitation or by bureaucratic supremacy (Yates, 1988, p.269). One method of dealing with the economic exploitation in the manufacturing sector on both sides of the border was for workers to have equality of purchasing power, or wage parity as it is referred to in the United States and Canada.

Having failed to attain wage parity in 1958, the UAW made another attempt in 1965. When the Canadian Auto-Pact was signed on January 16, 1965 UAW President Walter Reuther made it clear that there would no longer be any justification for continuing the disparity in wages between Canadian and American auto-workers. Reuther also made it clear that this wage gap problem would be a priority item on the UAW's collective bargaining agenda when contract talks opened in 1967. During the 1967 negotiations wage parity was finally realized under the International agreement at Chrysler. Reuther's position was that it made better sense to negotiate

wage parity in the United States because the full weight of the UAW was at the bargaining table and Chrysler was the only automaker under an International agreement covering workers on both sides of the border. Additionally, the UAW successfully attained a common expiry date for all the big three automobile contracts. On the surface the Chrysler International agreement was beneficial to workers. However, it also gave the International union a higher degree of control over the local unions. In establishing pattern bargaining and the three year contracts, it enabled the union officials the opportunity to administer the agreement and to concentrate on workers problems.

International agreements permit control over bargaining, political and social activity as well as most internal trade union matters, in particular grievance settlements. When Dennis McDermott was elected Canadian Director for the union in 1968, he allowed the International UAW officers to do all of the collective bargaining for the Canadian members. McDermott lacked the zest to engage in such exercises and did not engage in bargaining throughout his tenure with the UAW.<sup>1</sup> During the 1960's and 1970's the UAW in Canada, like the Woodworkers' Union, experienced limited autonomy and limited

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<sup>1</sup> A master contract is an instrument that envelops all union locals of a particular corporation in Canada and their agreements. An international agreement would cover all locals of a particular corporation in North America.

freedom to pursue their own bargaining goals. This is especially true of Chrysler workers because of their International agreement. The 1970's was an era of much unrest in the Canadian Region. There was internal conflict between the UAW Canadian administration and the left caucus. The left caucus had developed a strong local union power base in Locals 200 and 444 in Windsor and Local 222 in Oshawa. The left wing of the UAW propagandized in opposition to President Richard Nixon's attempt to impose his tax program and the Domestic International Sales Corporation (DISC) on the Canadian economy and the Auto Pact. The Domestic International Sales Corporation was an American corporation, usually a subsidiary, whose income was primarily attributable to exports. Income tax on 50 percent of a DISC's income was usually deferred. It was generally in a lower overall corporate tax bracket than would normally be incurred. The availability of DISC would also blunt one incentive that had existed for United States firms to locate production facilities abroad rather than at home. This was contrary to the Auto-Pact safeguards that guaranteed investment and production in Canada. Angered by the implications of this, Dennis McDermott led a contingent of UAW local union president to Canada's capital, Ottawa. The union outlined to the Canadian government the deleterious effects of the DISC. program and the effect that the proposed changes in the Auto Pact would have on Canadian autoworkers (United States-Canadian Auto-Pact Agreement, 1965, p.243). The

combined pressure of the Canadian UAW and the New Democratic Party convinced the Liberal Government to retract their proposal to remove the safeguards in the Auto Pact (Yates,C.A.B., 1988,p.386).

Mr. McDermott, in an effort to further quell the rising opposition in the Canadian Region, took control of the entire Canadian collective bargaining process during the 1973 negotiations. To determine the depth of nationalistic sentiments among the UAW rank and file, the UAW administration conducted a secret referendum vote among the four Canadian UAW locals in the Chrysler International agreement, namely locals 444, 1090, 1459, and 1498. They had been selected for the secret vote because Chrysler had been selected by the International union as the strike target. Results of the vote leaned heavily in favour of the International union and the membership chose to remain within the confines of the International agreement.

McDermott stood strongly in defence of International unions and spoke out on their track records as examples of good trade unionism. McDermott and his Canadian staff, including Bob White were of the opinion that International unions remained the most effective means for bargaining with multi-national corporations. At this time both McDermott and Bob White were International union supporters, and they immediately put out

any attempt by left wing caucus members to fan the fires of nationalism (Yates,1988,p.387). But the fervour of nationalism continued to plague McDermott. He did not want to appear as the administrator of a colonial regime. McDermott persisted, he requested permission of the UAW International Executive Board to restructure the Canadian Region so that it took on a Canadian identity. McDermott said it was important that the Canadian UAW members be regarded as more than just a satellite of UAW headquarters in Detroit. In his memo to UAW Solidarity House, International Headquarters in Detroit, McDermott requested that the Canadian Region have separate affiliation to world union organizations, and that the International union provide adequate staff in Canada to address economic policies, union education matters, international affairs, and arbitration proceedings. The International union reached a compromise and McDermott was given the authority to implement these requests.

Although Dennis McDermott did not want to appear as a colonial administrator, in essence he was. Bureaucracy is a system of control and the Canadian leadership was under the control of the UAW hierarchy. With support from the International leadership, the Canadian section of the UAW was given considerable autonomy, and a new association was formed (McDermott, Dennis, Director,UAW Canada, minutes of the report to the Canadian UAW Council, Oct.31,Nov.11,1970,p.3-4).

However, McDermott failed in his bid to build solidarity in the Canadian Region. The internal factions were still voicing their opposition, but aside from the internal squabbles, there was a greater feeling of independence and decision making in the Canadian Region. Finally, a new financial arrangement was worked out to allow Canadian members' dues to be spent in Canada (Yates,C.A.B.,1988,p.391).

#### THE BEGINNING OF THE END

According to Robert White, Director of the UAW in Canada and First Vice-President of the International Union, the split from the International union was a natural evolution. In the Canadian Region White equated this "natural evolution" with the changing of Region Seven to the Canadian Region of the UAW (Yates,1988,p.391). The International UAW was made up of eighteen regions of which Canada was number seven, before the name change. With the name change it did not change the configuration of the union. The structure of the UAW consists of eighteen regions, 1, 1a, etc. The Canadian Region was called region seven before the UAW leadership in Canada requested that it be changed to the Canadian Region.

Robert White, hand picked successor to McDermott, was elected Director of the Canadian UAW in Toronto, Ontario in 1978. A special one day conference had been called for the Canadian



Council of the UAW to elect a new Canadian Director. Dennis McDermott vacated the position because he had been elected President of the Canadian Labour Congress.

White had first been appointed to the UAW staff in the summer of 1960. He began his staff career in the organizing department. Since the early days of Walter Reuther staff assignments were made on the premise that the incumbents supported the administration's policies. After McDermott's election to the Canadian Director's position, he appointed White as one of his administrative assistants. White held that position until 1978 when he took over from McDermott. As is customary in the UAW there are procedures in the CAW Constitution for electing the Director of the Regions. That is the formal way. Generally, the successor is selected by the administrative caucus and then voted on at the convention, which a majority of the delegates are administrative supporters. This caucus procedure was enunciated by Walter Reuther when he became president and is a relevant part of the UAW.

White was a protege of Walter Reuther and a staunch social unionist. He had said publicly many times that he revered Walter Reuther as a trade unionist. What did he find so admirable about Walter Reuther? In his early youth, Reuther learned from his father what it was to be a social democrat.

In the early years of his trade union involvement Reuther quit the Socialist Party because it would be too time consuming to form a third political party in the United States, and labour could tie itself to the tails of the Democratic Party (Barnard, John, Walter Reuther and The Rise of the Autoworkers, Little, Brown and Co. Canada, 1983, p.56). In some of his dealing with the automobile corporations Reuther did not use good judgement when signing collective agreements (Barnard, 1943, p.88). For example, during the second world war he signed a non-strike clause, he agreed to a five year contract at General Motors, (Barnard, 1950, p.143) a cap on the cost-of-living allowance, (Barnard, 1967, p.203) and negotiated profit sharing (Barnard, 1958, p.148). White admired Reuther for his oratorical skills, his ability to bargain, and his commitment to social change. White had fashioned himself after Reuther in many ways: he developed some of Reuther's candour, and his ruthlessness in dealing with the opposition when his opinions were challenged. But sparring with him on issues rarely occurs now because opposition is practically extinct in the CAW Council.

Almost immediately after assuming the position of Canadian Director in 1978 White had his first baptism. Some corporations embarked on a campaign of plant closures and concession demands, and the first of such cutbacks came at a strike at the McKinnon Company in St. Catherines. The company

insisted on twenty-five percent cut in future cost-of-living payouts and other concessions. This was compounded by the fact that Canada was entering into an economic recessionary period that would extend into the early 1980's.

The wage and other concessions workers made to Chrysler Corporation in October 1979 were pushed through as a sign of good faith to Chrysler's bankers and an incentive to the United States Congress to pass the Chrysler Loan Guarantee Act. The passage of that bill was contingent upon workers giving concessions worth almost six-hundred and seventy-three million dollars. Congress picked up on the message immediately, and in January of 1980 made it clear that there would be a demand for further concessions (Moody, 1988, p.165).

White was opposed to workers having to sacrifice hard won gains and wage increases in an attempt to solve the financial difficulties of Chrysler Corporation (White, Robert, Hard Bargains, 1987, p.139). The Canadian leadership was of the opinion that the UAW in the United States was concentrating more on the state of the automobile corporations and not protecting the interests of workers (White, 1987, p.84). This was apparent when the UAW sent letters to Chrysler workers in 1979 which said in part,

An agreement that involves some sacrifices.....was necessary to support the government assistance to save our jobs...if sacrifices are not made there will be no loan guarantees...no jobs

(Moody, 1988, p. 165-66).

The UAW International officers determined contract policy based solely on the financial conditions of the corporations in the United States. At the Chrysler master bargaining table in 1980, only three members of the committee were Canadian, one of whom was Local 444 President, Frank LaSorda. In an interview with the author, LaSorda stated that Robert Nickerson, Administrative Assistant to White, insisted that Chrysler open their financial books to the union. The company complied and the books revealed a very bleak financial picture.

The Chrysler UAW Master Bargaining Committee moved to Washington to discuss the Loan Guarantee Act with Congress. To receive the government's loan guarantees the union had to agree that its membership would grant concessions. The three Canadian delegates voted in favour of concessions. Commenting on this in an interview with the author, Douglas Fraser said;

There were no negotiations, the agreement was strictly imposed on all the Chrysler UAW local unions by the United States Congress. It was one of the worst agreements I ever signed. (Interview, Frank LaSorda, also reported in the Windsor Star, Jan. 2, 1980)

One former UAW leader argued that indirect political dominance by the United States Congress over Canadian workers would constitute imperialism. Local 444 President Frank LaSorda stated in the Windsor Star, "Workers in Canada should not be

coerced nor be subjected to legislation as enacted by the United States Congress (Interview, Frank LaSorda, also reported in the Windsor Star, Jan.2,1980).

In 1980 Chrysler Corporation was looking for more concessions. The results of a meeting held in the UAW Local 444 hall in January of 1980 indicated that many of the leadership refused to participate in giving the company any more concessions. Douglas Fraser suggested to the Canadian workers that if they did not want to join in with their American brothers they should consider withdrawing from the International agreement, and the Canadian workers complied. Later, Douglas Fraser said that to imply that the Canadian workers were "thrown out" of the International agreement is a falsehood, referring to a statement in Bob White's book, Hard Bargains. "They made a choice, a free choice" said Fraser (Interview, Douglas Fraser, Past President UAW International Union, Nov.28,1990).

It did not take General Motors and Ford Motor long to approach the UAW in the United States to reopen their agreements to ask for concessions in specific areas.

The UAW's Ford Council voted not to reopen the national contract or make any concessions before the official expiration date of September 1982. (Moody,1988,p.183)

But the Director of the UAW Ford Department, Don Ephlin announced that Ford locals could reopen their own agreements

contrary to the Ford Council's position. In June of 1981, Douglas Fraser called a meeting of the UAW International Executive at Sawmill Creek, Ohio, and the executive concluded that the Ford and General Motors contracts would not be reopened (White, Robert, 1987, p.183). At a subsequent meeting on December 7th of 1981 the UAW Executive Board decided that the Ford and General Motors Councils could make their own decisions as to reopening local agreements.

Robert White was opposed to both these approaches, and reasoned that for the councils to make their decisions independently without the involvement of the International officers was designed to get the leadership off the hook (White, 1987, p.183). White's reasoning in opposing concessions was that there would be a snowball effect in both countries. Granting concessions to the large automobile companies would open the flood gates to other corporations large and small to seek concessions from workers. White said, "We've got to stop the haemorrhage." (White, 1987, p.170)

The 1982 Big Three negotiations got underway with some difficulty. General Motors and Chrysler were demanding more concessions from workers. The main issue with Chrysler workers was the recovery of many concessions relinquished in 1979. They were three dollars per hour behind the workers at General Motors and Ford. General Motors settled their

contract with the UAW.

Chrysler workers in Canada went on strike in 1982 to recoup lost wages they had surrendered under the 1979-80 concessions game. When the Canadian strike was called, the Chrysler American brothers and sisters remained on the job (White, 1987, p. 215).

The membership in the United States refused to accept an offer from the U.S. corporation and told the leadership so. The UAW leadership in the U.S. decided to put the negotiations on hold pending the outcome of the Canadian strike. There was no contract and no strike. The Canadian UAW workers had prepared themselves for a strike on October 15th, 1982. Hearing that the date had been moved into November, Chrysler workers in Windsor and the Ajax Trim Plant near Toronto, embarked on wildcat strikes simultaneously, feeling somewhat betrayed by the strike date extension. In Windsor the in-plant representatives were successful in getting the workers back on the job. However, the labour peace was short-lived. When a foreman threatened some workers with disciplinary action, the workers left the plant again (White, 1987, p. 216). Workers generally respond to a wildcat strike and work together to function as an informal organization. A leader is usually selected from within the group and planning is done on a minute to minute basis (Brecher, 1972, p. 224). This wildcat

strike quickly became an ugly affair, with some four to five hundred workers milling around the Chrysler gates at the Pillette Road Van Plant. There was considerable drinking, bonfires were lit and a vehicle was tipped over. Fear of starting an all out riot kept the Windsor Police at a discreet distance. Neighbours residing in nearby homes were afraid to send their children to school and did not dare leave their homes (White, 1987,p.215). White dispatched some of the negotiating team members to Windsor to encourage the workers to return to their jobs. After considerable discussion with the picketers, they agreed to return to work. (The writer was at the scene with the union representatives and the mood of the workers was very mean and abusive. The local union leadership were jostled and pushed and were intimidated by the union workers.) The official strike against Chrysler began on November 5th, 1982 and lasted for five and one-half weeks. According to White, Douglas Fraser had offered to come to the negotiations in Toronto to assist White in settling the dispute (White,1987,p.234). Fraser arrived on December 9th, and a settlement was ratified on December 12th, 1982 (White,1987,p.239). The workers received a pay increase of one dollar and fifteen cents an hour, the amount of cost-of-living allowance they had given up to concessions in 1980. Historically, this agreement negotiated by the Canadian negotiating committee was the first Big Three agreement preceding any agreement with the UAW in the United States.



Some time later, Local 444 President, Ken Gerard, in reporting to the membership said,

I just want to point out to our members, from 1968 to 1982 we were under an International agreement and the Chrysler workers agreed to disband the structure of International contracts, whereby a Canadian National Negotiating Committee was formed for the first time. We negotiated our own agreements in 1982, 1983, and 1985, and did very well. (Gerard;#299,p.2)

## ENGINEERING THE SPLIT THROUGH THE MASS MEDIA

Michels outlines the importance of the press to the leadership of trade unions. The press constitutes a potent instrument for the conquest, the preservation and the consolidation of power on the part of leaders (Michels, 1968, p. 149). The press can be used by leaders with effect to influence public opinion. In many instances leaders of trade unions utilize the press to send messages to the rank and file. Wendy Cuthbertson, public relations director for the Canadian UAW with her expertise enabled White to transmit information to the public. For example, John Deverell, reporter for the Toronto Star wrote a front page story on November 1, 1984 indicating that White was pulling the Canadian segment of the UAW out of the International structure (Deverell, Nov., 1984). At a subsequent press conference White said they were not advocating a breakup but were looking for structural changes (White, Nov. 1, 1984). This type of action was not conducive to good relations with the leaders of the UAW International union. Owen Bieber responded,

...internal problems that may have a direct affect on the organization should be discussed with the board members at an International Executive Board meeting, not in the press. (Bieber, interview)

According to Randy Roy, labour writer for the London Free Press "...the labour journals are full of eulogistic orations concerning the personality of trade union leaders." (Roy, July

14,1984) In an article in Report on Business Magazine, Wilfred List portrays White as "Organized Labour's Great White Hope." (List, March 3,1985,p.31). Marty Beneteau, labour reporter for the Windsor Star described White as "Our labour hero taking on U.S. bullies." (Beneteau,Dec. 3,1984,p.1).

The press can be used with effect to influence public opinion by cultivating a sensation, notably White's claim that the UAW International union threatened to withhold strike assistance to General Motors workers during the 1984 strike (Job, Ann,Dec. 16,1984).

The Canadian General Motors strike began on October 17th, 1984. Within days the strike began to close American plants. General Motors was depending on Owen Bieber to call a halt to the strike (White,Robert, interview, April 1,1991). In an interview with the author, Bieber disclaimed any attempt by him to stop the strike nor deny the Canadian workers strike benefits. He said that he as the President, did not have the arbitrary right to unilaterally stop workers from receiving strike pay. That could only be an executive board decision (Bieber, interview). Trade union leaders often use the press to make attacks upon their adversaries, or to launch grave accusations against persons of note in the same organization. For example, during the General Motors negotiations in 1984, White accused Bieber in the media of interfering in his

attempt to reach a settlement with General Motors (List, March 3, 1985, p.31). White played heavily on this leading up to the split.

Michels, further states, that accusations may not be established upon a sufficient foundation of truth, but at any rate they serve to raise a duststorm. This means they are frequently used by leaders in order to gain the sympathy of the rank and file and to enable those leaders to keep the guidance of the movement in their hands (Michels, 1962, p.149). White said he told General Motors negotiators that he had a loan of \$10 million from the Canadian Labour Congress and he would use it to pay the General Motors workers if Bieber was threatening to withhold strike funds. White later admitted he was bluffing on the \$10 million and maintained the International union was not planning to hold back strike pay.

We had the strike pay. I told General Motors I had the cheque. We would have been able to find the \$10 million. I didn't exactly have it in my back pocket (McAndrew, Nov. 2, 1984).

As the 1984 General Motors negotiations got underway, the gap between Owen Bieber and Robert White began to widen. When you are planning a war you cannot be fraternizing with the enemy. As in previous sessions of negotiations, the General Motors economic package contained no hourly increase in the second year and included lump sum payments to workers. The Canadian leadership were opposed to lump sum payments due to the fact that in the next set of negotiations the base rate would be

the same as it was three years previous. Further, lump sum payments would effect benefits based on wage rates, such as, sick pay, premium pay, holiday pay. White told Bieber that the American economic proposal did not fit the Canadian agenda and "would not fly" in Canada. It simply was not ratifiable (White, interview). White's distaste for Bieber's negotiating skills and White's disinclination to have Canadian economic contracts dictated in Detroit made it inevitable that he would be pushing for Canadian autonomy (White,Robert, interview).

Because of the mythological mistrust that was developing between the two leaders, White had a confidante in Solidarity House, (UAW headquarters in Detroit) who was feeding White information on the negotiations. (Note: the author had occasion to speak with the individual at a convention. He admitted to me that he was the individual but would not give me permission to use his name in this thesis). This person kept White informed of Bieber's activities during the negotiations with General Motors (White, interview). It was during the General Motors 1984 negotiations that White and the GM Master Bargaining Committee agreed to allow the National Film Board of Canada to document caucus room bargaining proceedings. The purpose of this was to show the viewing public how the union leadership reviews and discusses the company's latest offers in the caucus rooms. General Motors was a willing partner in the exercise (White,1987,p.235).

When the people of the National Film Board asked what they could expect, White replied, "You never know. You could be filming the breakup of the International union." (White, 1987, p. 255). At no time was he, Owen Bieber aware that a documentary was being filmed in Canada (Bieber, interview). At times the film crew was moving from the union's caucus room to White's office in the hotel. The film entitled "Final Offer" contained footage of White in shouting matches on the telephone with Owen Bieber over bargaining issues. Bieber discounts the accusations that White and others made in the film,

I did not at any time interfere over there, refuse strike assistance, and once more did not resort to playing games as some people did. I was not aware at any time that our conversation was being taped or filmed (Bieber, interview).

At the March 1984 UAW International Board meeting, prior to the commencement of negotiations, White voiced his opinion and concern over the fact that the International union had not responded to General Motors President Roger Smith's statement at a speech delivered to the Economic Club of Detroit, when he said "...annual improvement factors for workers were gone forever" (White, minutes, Dec. 10, 1984). At the 1948 General Motors negotiations, Charles E. Wilson, Chairman of the Board, introduced the concept of the annual improvement factor. Conceding that workers deserved a steadily rising standard of living as the corporation became more efficient and prosperous, General Motors proposed that an annual improvement

factor be built into the wage structure. The factor represented each worker's share of rising output per worker-hour, and was based on general expectations of productivity improvements rather than on General Motors' own performance (Barnard, 1983, p. 137-8). The annual improvement factor became the major obstacle in the 1984 negotiations with General Motors. Even though Canadian contract demands are costed identically with the American package, Roger Smith would not agree to an annual improvement factor for Canadian workers. If it were to be put into the Canadian agreement, the American workers would consider it an entitlement also. In a telephone conversation with White, Bieber told him that in order to avoid any upheaval among the American workers, any AIF would have to be cloaked under some other name. The resolve was to call it a Special Canadian Adjustment (Bieber, interview).

White did not give any specific incidents but he stated to the author that there was a general mistrust of Bieber among the local union leadership in Canada. Also, the Canadian union officials were concerned with the direction the union was going under Bieber's leadership (White, interview). White was convinced that because of the differences generated during the 1984 negotiations, a change in the internal structure of the union must take place. "I'm not advocating a break up with the UAW" White told a press gathering on November 2, 1984. "I would prefer to keep the relationship with the

International union but there need to be changes. You can't expect the structure of the 1940's to stand up in the '90's" (Ward, Nov.2,1984). White went on to say that he had no plans to try to move the Canadian UAW away from the International umbrella group (White, interview).

Interestingly, at the 1982 annual Christmas party for the Canadian UAW staff, White and some of the top officers (names of whom White did not want to divulge), embarked on an informal conversation about the direction of the UAW and the consequences to the Canadian membership if a split was inevitable from the International union (Bob White, interview).

In August of 1983, the same year Owen Bieber was elected president of the UAW, White called all the Presidents of the Canadian local unions to a conference at the Canadian UAW Education Centre at Port Elgin, Ontario. White also invited President Owen Bieber to the conference. He addressed the conference and left immediately after. During the course of that conference, White discussed with the leadership what had been transpiring at the highest level of the union, including the friction between the Canadian and American leadership. Anticipating problems if the contents of the conversation got into the wrong hands, and nervous about the discussions that took place during the conversation, White had the event video-



taped and took the tape home with him (White, 1987,p.177).

In White's words,

I was so nervous about bringing all that stuff into the open that I video-taped it and took the tape home with me...I was taking a chance but these people were the shop-floor leadership in Canada, and I wanted them to know about the issues and conflicts that were developing. (White,1987,p.177)

At that meeting White tossed out the question of the possibility of getting out of the International union. There was very little, if any debate on the subject (Unpublished noted, August,1983).

In November of 1984, after the General Motors strike, White took his plan to restructure the Canadian UAW to his staff representatives. The resolve from that meeting was that White was to make it clear to Owen Bieber that, in order for the Canadian arm of the UAW to stay within the International structure the Canadians would require their own autonomy (White, Robert, interview). On December first and second of 1984, at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto, Ontario, White made his thoughts known regarding relations within the International union to the three hundred and fifty plus Canadian Council delegates. White told the delegates that structural changes within the International UAW would be necessary (White, Robert, minutes, Dec. 1-2,1984,p.29). The press had been made aware of the special Canadian Council meeting and the resolve for autonomy arising out of it. White then went to Owen Bieber to request that the relationship in

question be put on the agenda for the March 1985 UAW Executive Board meeting. Because of the intense media interest in the business of the UAW, Bieber replied that the meeting should not be delayed until March, and that a full discussion be held in December to dispose of the matter (White, 1984,p.29). At one point Owen Bieber remarked that at no time did White invite any International officer to any Canadian Council meetings to discuss any issues that might be bothering the Canadian leadership. The confrontation was conducted as though it was a one-sided argument, as though the UAW Executive Board was not a player in the scene.

In White's submission to the International Executive Board he would declare,

Under my leadership, I insist we assume responsibility for our own destiny, (White,1984,p.30) ... where our unions collective bargaining in the United States is different than ours and we must pursue a program in the interest of our Canadian membership, and do so without interference from anyone in the United States, and without any veiled threat to deny strike authorization or strike assistance pay (White,1984,p.31) ... and to use the five hundred and fifty million (U.S.\$) strike fund without restriction. (White,1984, p.33)

White continued by telling the Council delegates that he would be telling the Executive Board members that during future collective bargaining there could be absolutely no interference or intervention regarding those negotiations with any corporation officials, by any staff officer, or by any

staff member without the specific request of the Director for Canada and International Vice-President (White, 1984,p.35).

"Believe me, this is not about Bob White's politics or personal ambitions" (White,1984,p.36).

Whatever we do, whatever direction we decide to go, we must go united, and if we are, in my opinion, our union and our members in both the United States and Canada will be better off in the future."  
(White,1984, p.37)

#### THE CANADIAN UAW" DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

According to Robert White, there had been growing frustration among the Canadian leadership since 1979 when the American UAW International union granted concessions to Chrysler Corporation. This was further escalated when the Canadian leadership perceived American UAW behaviour as interference in the Canadian contract talks in 1982 and again in 1984. White commented,

I'm not going through every major collective bargaining situation, be it two or three years, where I have internal stress, or Owen has it with me or we have it as colleagues. (White,1984,p.34)

In his proclamation to the International Executive Board on December 10, 1984, White indicated there were articles that must be agreed to "...if this International union is an equal partnership." (UAW,IEB,p.20) The articles White was referring to were the following: first, Canadians must be allowed the right to pursue their own bargaining goals up to

and including a strike, without interference from the International officers; second, there could be no interference or intervention by any International officer or representative permitted unless requested by the Canadian Director; third, Canadian staff would report and work directly under the administration of the Canadian Director; finally, the Canadian union would have the right to pursue mergers with other unions, including Canadian sections of International unions whether or not parallel mergers were achievable in the United States (IEB,1984,p.25).

The Past President of Local 199 in St. Catharines, Ontario, James Connell indicated in an interview with the author that the Canadian UAW locals in the General Motors chain opted out of becoming a part of International agreements primarily because international wage settlements were based on economic conditions in the United States (Connell, interview, Feb.26,1992). As for autonomy during negotiations, the Canadian General Motors Master Bargaining Committee resolved most of their contract demands except for some technical language that was finished in Solidarity House because there were no experts in Canada. Representatives from UAW headquarters would finalize that language.

In 1983 the International union had divided its geographical jurisdiction over eighteen regions, and each region was

administered by a Director who was automatically a board member (Constitutional UAW Convention, Dallas, Texas, May 1983). Although the Regional Directors had a degree of autonomy, it was their job to follow the policies of the UAW Executive Board and to exercise political and ideological influence on the membership. As to the authorization of strikes, the decision rested entirely in the hands of the International Executive Board which voted on the question (Constitution article, 13, sec. 5, p. 27).

Detroit Free Press writer, Helen Fogel wrote,

White came to the quarterly UAW board meeting with a Canadian Council mandate to get the Canadian UAW members the freedom to run their own affairs. Specifically, White asked the International Executive Board to allow Canadians to run their collective bargaining sessions without interference from International officers, to give them free access to the strike fund, and to allow the Director to hire and supervise their own staff. (Fogel, Helen, Dec. 11, 1984)

The International Executive Board adopted a statement which said in part,

Demands for total Canadian control of union staff and operating funds and for direct automatic access to the strike fund are demands which cannot be accommodated in our.....structure. In order for our union to function in the best interest of all its members there must be accountability..... the Canadian demand to the central body would destroy our union. (UAW, IEB., p. 86-7)

Owen Bieber's opinion was that if White's request was granted,

The dilemma this type of structure would cause in our union would be utter chaos. At some time or other one or more of the eighteen regions would be asking for some type of autonomy similar to the

Canadians. (Bieber press statement, Dec.10, 1984)

At the conclusion of the December 10, 1984 International Executive Board meeting a committee was formed to work out the details to accommodate and provide for the transfer of certain administrative powers and responsibilities to the Canadian Region of the UAW and the separation of administrative constituents and local unions in the Canadian Region.

In September 1985, at a founding convention in the Sheraton Centre in Toronto, the Canadian Region by representative votes adopted their own Constitution creating and establishing the UAW in Canada as a separate and independent national trade union.

## SUMMARY

### Oligarchy

The evidence contained in this thesis clearly vindicates Michels' "iron law of oligarchy."

Large scale organizations give their officers a near monopoly of power ... trade unions and other large organizations tend to develop a bureaucratic structure...the price of increased bureaucracy is the concentration of power at the top ... the lessening of influence by the rank and file ... unions are governed by one-party oligarchies consisting of a political apparatus, able to maintain itself in power indefinitely, and to recruit its own successors through co-optation (Michels,p.16,24).

When Robert Michels wrote of the iron law of oligarchy in Political Parties, he was referring to the tendency of those who obtain leadership positions to direct their activities in terms of maintaining those positions. As union organizations grew, they tended to create a hierarchy of authority and a system of rules. Because of the complexities of the organization and growth of membership, it became necessary to increase the size of the staff by adding professionals in fields such as accounting, law and office staff. Union leaders put in position to lead an organization have certain abilities and personal qualities which enable them to have direct influence on their members. This type of leader can remain in control for many years. Once a bureaucracy is established and the officers are elected, chances of removing

them from office are slim, in fact, in many cases acclamations are the norm. It is the duty of the leader to develop and carry out the policies of the institution.

For many years control and decision making in the UAW had been in the hands of a few. Walter Reuther was a leader of the UAW International union for thirty-five years and was elected president for the last twenty-four of those years. He was president when he died in 1969. His initial task as president was to rid the union of factions and communists because they were disruptive in the workplace and difficult to control. As president of the UAW, Reuther controlled the Executive Board, the UAW staff, and all international departments, and he set the philosophical direction of the UAW. George Burt was Director of the Canadian arm of the union, and was in power for thirty years until he retired. Dennis McDermott was president until he moved to the Canadian Labour Congress as its president. Robert White did the same. None of them were ever defeated in an election while they were in these top positions.

For forty years the operation and the contract negotiations were under the control of the American UAW officials. In "Big Three" bargaining, wages and benefits were negotiated at the main bargaining table in Detroit, Michigan, but they applied to Canadians members as well. For forty years the bargaining



strategy was centred on economic conditions which existed in America, the assumption being that what was good for the American workers was also good for the Canadian workers. Often the differences in the national economic standards in each country were never considered. For the most part this system worked well.

### Business and Social Unionism

There is a tendency to regard unionism a group action mechanism for raising wages, improving pensions and benefits, and addressing working conditions and health and safety concerns in the workplace. Business unionists see their role as basically the one described above, and they seldom extend beyond this narrow definition. Social unionists see their role in a much broader context. Social unionists want to have influence outside the narrow fields of union administration and collective bargaining, so they become engaged in the work for world peace, or the protection of the environment or they may lobby for legislated labour law reform, or to improve the status of women. Social unions involve not only the top union officers, leadership encourages involvement by their membership in these public organizations. In this way, three goals are achieved; firstly, the community organizations are aided in achieving their goals, secondly, the union members feel that they are playing an active role in and for their

union, lessening their sense of distance from the organization, and thirdly, the union enhances its public image in the community.

Although these two systems of unionism differ in their basic philosophy of what a union is, they do not differ in their organizational theory of oligarchic administration. Indeed, the decision to be a business union or a social union is determined by the oligarchic administration, and the memberships' participation is reflected by that decision. Robert White and Owen Bieber were both oligarchs, and their organizations operated that way. White referred to himself as a social unionist, and the facts substantiated that claim, while Bieber had moved the UAW International union away from its original social union philosophy to a more business union one.

### The Plan

There was a limited amount of autonomy and input by the Canadian leadership into the UAW International union, and Canadian contract demands were generally ignored by UAW representatives. During the period from 1945 to the early 1970's, there was occasionally some discourse and dissatisfaction with the International union, and some Canadians cried for closer national ties and anti-American

sentiments, but these rumblings never generated any action to split from the parent body until after 1978, when Robert White assumed the directorship of the Canadian UAW.

In 1979 and 1980, Chrysler Corporation was on the verge of bankruptcy, and went with UAW President Douglas Fraser to the United States Senate for bail-out money and loan guarantees. They came home with the guarantees but with the stipulation that the Chrysler employees under the Master Agreement, including Canadian members, must all make substantial wage sacrifices, which they did. The issue of whether a foreign government should be in a position to dictate to Canadian workers the terms of their working agreement became a cause for concern among Canadian UAW leadership and membership particularly at the Chrysler plants. The Canadian leadership determined that this would not happen again, and began to dissociate itself from international contracts. Additionally, in Canada by 1982, the interest rates were double digit and the inflation rate was much higher than in America, creating a large gulf between the economies of the two countries.

The National Film Board of Canada approached Robert White in 1983 about making a documentary on collective bargaining, and the result was the film "Final Offer", covering the 1984 negotiations with General Motors. When the National Film Board asked White what to expect while filming, he opined that

they could be filming the end of the International union. This statement suggests that a plan was already in place.

Owen Bieber was elected President of the UAW International union in May of 1983, and in August Robert White held a conference for all local union presidents in the Canadian region. White raised the issue of friction between himself and the others on the National Executive Board, and suggested there may be a need to separate from the parent body, but did not garner much support for the idea. White also dreamt out loud about building a metalworkers union similar to the one in Europe, but again did not garner much support.

When the UAW Canadian Region held its bargaining conference in April 1984, the goals for negotiations were, for the first time in history, substantially different from the goals of the UAW International bargaining conference. The Americans were looking for lump sum payments and profit sharing, while the Canadians were looking for an annual improvement factor. This put Owen Bieber in a precarious bargaining position because General Motors management had already made public the fact they would not bargain an annual improvement factor, and history shows that White did this to create an issue around which he could move the leadership to a split, and in the end to move the membership to accept as necessary, the split.

## The Execution

General Motors was selected the target company for the 1984 big three negotiations in Canada. White's selection of General Motors was premeditated, and the fortuitous opportunity to have the National Film Board recording the events would provide a historical record of the split. The General Motors talks in America were concluded in a timely fashion, but a lot of animosity between the American and Canadian leaders had built up. Firstly, during the General Motors negotiations White had indicated to the press that there had to be drastic changes in the structure of the UAW as it is now for the Canadian members to remain in the International union. Secondly, there had been rumours circulating in the press concerning the possible withholding of strike pay to Canadian strikers by Owen Bieber. These rumours, although untrue, were creating anxiety among the membership. All of the filming for the documentary had been done from the Canadian side and Owen Bieber was unaware of the clandestine operation.

White said on numerous occasions that this disagreement was not about personalities, it was about the direction that the International union was taking the membership. It was about the lack of vision on the part of the officers of the union. The union was not combatting the organizational changes

corporations were making that would have economic effects on the membership. Robert White felt that he could not, as a social unionist, continue in the direction the International union was taking. With the aid of the General Motors negotiations, the sympathetic press that he received, and the documentary made by the National Film Board, White was able to convince the leadership in Canada that in order for the union movement in Canada to progress it would have to sever its relationship with the parent union. Armed with a mandate from the Canadian UAW Council and a list of demands, Robert White met with the International Executive Board and his demands were turned down by the board. As a result of the meeting the split became reality and the Canadian UAW became a national union.

## APPENDIX

### SOURCES AND METHODS

In most instances the activities and events discussed in this thesis had appeared in the media, press, radio and television. In some cases different sources were used to corroborate some of the events. Many newspaper reports were the source of accounting of events. The Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, Windsor Star, The London Free Press, The Detroit News, The Detroit Free Press, are some of the daily newspapers that reported the labour activities. In addition to the media reports some thirty taped interviews of radio talk shows were considered. The tapes contained interviews of economists, political scientists, labour historians, and labour leaders. These interviews covered issues that related to the Canadian union workers, the effect the split would have on their relation with the American worker. In addition I talked with the Presidents of different locals. Also, how this new union setup would effect the collective bargaining process in the coming years.

### SURVEY SAMPLE OF CHRYSLER WORKERS

I selected the Chrysler workers because of their direct

involvement in the concession era. The Chrysler workers were the first automobile workers to give back benefits and wages. I felt that they would be more aware of the significance of the split.

In selecting the survey sample representative of the population, I excluded the employees that were hired after 1984. The total population of dues paying members at the Windsor Chrysler assembly plants was 6,635 prior to 1984. The number of employees hired in 1984 was 635, this left a total population of 6,000. By selecting every 24 workers from the seniority list I arrived at a total of 250 respondents. On August 22, 1991, with the assistance of the representatives from CAW Local 444 the questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents by the union representative. The respondents were from all areas of the plant. The seniority ranged from ten years to thirty-one years. Of the 238 questionnaires distributed 132 were returned. At the time that the survey was taken there was a high amount of employees on vacation and on sick leave.

From the questionnaire sheet, four questions were selected, 13, 14, 15, and 18A-B, that reflected the opinions of the rank and file on the split. The respondents to the questions were separated into three categories, skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled. The questionnaires were to be returned to the



union representative upon completion. There was no undue pressure put on the respondents.

The results of the questions are as follows. Starting with question 13, What was your opinion of the split? In the semi-skilled and unskilled category, 69% said it was good for the union; 11% said that they were in favour of the split; 5% said there should have been a vote; and 15% said we should decide on our own destiny.

In the skilled trades category, 60% said it was good for the union; 30% were in favour of the split; and 10% said that there should have been a vote. On question 14, What was your source of information on the split? In the semi-skilled and unskilled category 18% got their information from the mass media; 76% got their information from the union representative; and 6% got it from other means. In the skilled labour category, 36% got the information from the mass media; 55% were told by their union representatives and 9% from other means. In most cases other means was word of mouth. Question 15, Should the rank and file be involved in making decisions on such important issues? In the semi-skilled and unskilled categories, 50% said they should have a say; 4.7% said that elected representatives should make the decisions; and 31.2% stated that anything that effects the membership and their lives should have a say; 14.1% said they

pay the dues and should have a say. In the skilled trades category 85.7% said they should have a say; 14.3% said that the elected officials should make the decisions. Question 18A, Is the position of the Canadian union stronger or weaker now? In the skilled trades category 77.8% said that it was stronger now and 22.2% said that it was weaker. In the opinion of the semi-skilled and unskilled categories, 88.7% answered that the Canadian union was stronger now and 11.3% said it was weaker.

Question 18B, Why do you say this? In the skilled labour category, 42.9% said that we control our own bargaining agenda, 57.1% said that it is a Canadian contract. In the semi-skilled and unskilled category, 30% said that the Canadian members have control of their own destiny, 34.3% said that we negotiate their own contract and 35.7% that we are independent of the United States.

The results show that there was overwhelming support by the membership to split from the International union. However, there is strong evidence that the rank and file should have had a direct involvement in the final decision. In discussing the possibility of conducting a referendum among the rank and file on such important issues the President of the CAW Chrysler local and the Ford local stated emphatically that they were opposed to a referendum vote on any matter. The

rank and file elected them to carry out the business of the union and they intend to do just that.

CAW MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your job now at Chrysler?\_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you worked on your present job?\_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you been a member of the union?\_\_\_\_\_
4. Do you participate in local union membership meetings?
  1. Yes\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_ 3. Sometimes\_\_\_
  4. Ratification\_\_\_ 5. Other\_\_\_
5. Are you politically active in your local union? That is, do you vote in local union elections?
  1. Yes\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_
6. Have you ever filed a grievance?
  1. Yes\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_
7. Were you satisfied with the way your grievance was handled?
  1. Yes\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_ 3. Other\_\_\_
8. Was your local union involved in concession bargaining?
  1. Yes\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_
9. Do you think that unions should give up previous won gains?
  1. Yes\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_

Explain \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Did you have the opportunity to participate in making the decision about the concession demands of the company?

1. Yes\_\_\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_\_\_

11. How would you have voted, that is, should unions give in to company demands on concessions?

1. Yes\_\_\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you remember the split with the American union?

1. Yes\_\_\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_\_\_

13. What was your opinion of the split?

\_\_\_\_\_

14. What was your source of information on the split?

1. Union Representative\_\_\_\_\_

2. Mass media\_\_\_\_\_

3. Other\_\_\_\_\_

15. Should the rank and file be involved in making the decision on such an important issue?

1. Yes\_\_\_ 2. No. \_\_\_ Why do you say this?

16. Should there have been a referendum vote on the split?

1. Yes\_\_\_\_\_ 2. No\_\_\_\_\_

17. How would you have voted at the time?

1. For\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Against\_\_\_\_\_

18. Do you think the Canadian union is better or worse off now? Is the bargaining position of the Canadian union stronger or weaker now?

1. Stronger\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Weaker\_\_\_\_\_ 3. About the same\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you say this?\_\_\_\_\_

## ACRONYMS

AIB	Anti-Inflation Board
AIF	Annual Improvement Factor
CCF	Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
NDP	New Democratic Party
CCL	Canadian Congress of Labour
CLC	Canadian Labour Congress
CTU	Canadian Typographical Union
AFL	American Federation of Labour
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
IEB	International Executive Board
UAW	United Automobile Workers
LOC	Locals Opposed to Concessions
OFL	Ontario Federation of Labour
TLC	Trades and Labour Congress
UMW	United Mine Workers
GM	General Motors

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Hour Toronto, CKFM, Aga, CKFM, Metro Morning, CKO, Sepctrum CKO, Metro Morning, CBL, John Stahl Show, CFRB, As It Happens, CBC, Sunday Morning, C. Thomas, S. Horada, Metro Morning, Joe Cote, CBL As It Happens, Grey Maitland, CBL, Betty Kennedy, CFRB.

#### People Interviewed by the Media:

John Anderson, for CAW Local 112 president John Bettes, Gerard Docquier, Professor John Crispos, UAW/CAW economist Sam Ginden, Dennis McDermott, Gerry Michaud, labour analyst Harley Shaken, Jess Succamore, Dan Taylor, Robert White, B.J. Widdick.

Union Officers interviewed by the writer:

Skilled representative Charles Pidgeon, Local 444 CAW, President Larry Bauer, Local 444 CAW, Chairperson of the CAW Council, President Frank McAnally of Local 200 CAW, John Clout, former president of Local 199 and now a staff representative for the CAW, Douglas Fraser, Retired, Past President of the United Automobile and Aerospace Workers union, Owen Bieber, President of the United Automobile and Aerospace Workers Union, Robert White, President of the National Automobile Workers Union, Canada.

TABLE VII

## UNION MEMBERSHIP IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES 1955-86

YEAR	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP (,000)		AS A % OF NON AGRICULTURAL WORKERS	
	CANADA	U.S.	CANADA	U.S.
1955	1,268	16,127	33.7	31.8
1960	1,459	15,516	32.2	28.6
1965	1,589	18,269	29.7	30.1
1970	2,173	20,990	33.6	29.6
1975	2,884	22,207	36.9	28.9
1978	3,278	21,757	39.0	25.1
1981	3,487	20,647	37.4	22.6
1982	3,617	19,571	39.0	21.9
1983	3,563	17,717	40.0	20.4
1984	3,651	17,340	39.6	19.1
1985	3,666	16,996	39.0	18.3
1986	3,730	16,975	37.7	17.8

Source: The Current Industrial Relations Scene in Canada,  
1987 Queen's Industrial Relations Centre, Reference  
Tables, p.362

### VITA AUCTORIS

George Johnson was born in 1929 in Windsor, Ontario. He attended Assumption High School. He enrolled at the University of Windsor and obtained a B.A. in Psychology in 1981. In 1988, he completed his undergraduate studies and received an Honours degree in Sociology. He continued his education in Sociology and received the Master of Arts degree in October 1993.